

## **Too Good at Goodbyes by [littlemissmileven](#)**

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**Summary:** Sometimes, love just wasn't enough.

## 1. Chapter 1

El bite back her tongue to keep the tears from spilling down her cheeks, she was *devastated*. No, wait, devastated couldn't possibly describe the way she was feeling within this moment. So many emotions began filling her that her breathes became unsteady and turned from slow to fast. She began hyperventilating, all the memories of her and Mike began flooding her mind in one swift motion that her back had collided hard with her closest door.

She remembers the day Mike told her he had first loved her. Mike had been teaching El how to swim, she was delighted. She loved when Mike taught her things, she loved it especially when a look of pride began edging its way onto his face. They had been so happy back then, now it was as if all those memories were a distant fog. The salt water had clung on to his jet-black hair, his lips looked even more pink and full that it took everything in her power not to reach over and grab him right then and there. There was a mischievous look in his eyes that she remembered how fast her heart was beating that day, how he looked at her as if she was the whole reason for his entire existence. Like she was his universe, and she loved it, she loved him.

Before those three little words had left his mouth he lazily reached for her hand before he grasped it tightly, pressing a feather-like kiss against her palm. El watched in a daze as there entwinned hands fell in the crystal water in front of them, her heart had beated three times, the same amount of times he had squeezed her palm. Her mouth hung open as her eyes quickly locked with his frantically, he re mouthed the words as he squeezed her hand for the second time. She remembered her last thought, that she couldn't care less who was looking at their shared moment. She flung her small arms around his neck so fast that she hurled both their bodies into the water. She grasped Mike's neck so tightly as they kissed fast and desperately underwater as they sunk further and further down. Nothing else had seemed to matter within that moment except for Mike, he would always matter, he was the *only* thing that mattered to El.

For once in her life, El was scared. And just like that she broke,

painful sobs had wedged from out of her throat. She sounded as though she was drowning, sinking deeper and deeper down from herself and from Mike. Once she learned the truth off Nancy, she knew she could never forgot it. Never forgive *him*.

Her name is Emily, she moved to Hawkins with her older brother. She was only a year younger than Eleven. She should've noticed, Mike and El had always planned to leave after graduation. But everything seemed to change once the news spread around the small town of a new girl, a *beautiful* one. El hadn't seemed to of cared, why would she, she had been with Mike ever since she was thirteen. She knew that they loved each other so she had felt no threat. Until everything seemed to brim to the edge and now El was the one left with the broken heart, not him.

"El, sweetheart? Are you okay? Please, talk to me. Open the door," Mikes voice shook with worry as she heard another faint "Please." escape from the other side of *their* bedroom door. El shut her bloodshot eyes and counted to five to steady her crying before opening them, Mike had taught her that, to be able to help her control her powers and from losing herself whilst she was in her own element.

As El reached for the knob of the door she soon realised that this could be the last time she'd ever see Mike. If he could cheat, then he didn't deserve her. He didn't deserve her pure *love*, and my god she loved him with all her might. She couldn't ever love any other man as much as she did with this boy, with her Mike. Determination began filling her broken heart and mind as she pried the door open fast, in one stride he had her pressed against his warm, tight body. "Don't you dare scare me like that again, do you hear me?" he instructed, rubbing his nose with hers. The act alone almost betrayed El's body from her mind, she could do this. If he could cheat, then she would leave. Simple. It had to be right?

It had taken all of El's strength to hold back the look of disgust that was ready to wedge itself onto her delicate features.

"El, what's wrong?"

She looked away, already beginning to feel numb. He stepped even

closer if that was possible and grabbed her roughly by the arms, making her eyes swiftly land back on him. His lips were parted, ragged breaths escaping from them but its what his eyes were laying out in front of her that made her whole body tense up. Adoration swirled in them that El bit back a wince. Most of all he looked scared, utterly terrified, and she knew the exact reason for it. Because of her, because of *Emily*.

"Tell me, was she worth it?" El snarled up at him, but still let his hands wonder on her skin.

"Eleven," he barely choked out, his body going still. El ignored the way her heart broke just by hearing his desperation, he could suffer for all she cared. "I- It isn't what you think," Mike muttered, "I could never be with anyone but you El, I wouldn't."

"But you did, you fucked *Emily*. Don't even lie to me, I have loved you for years. You were the only boy I'd ever let touch me, to ever actually get the chance to love *me*. And you know what Mike? You fucking blew it, you blew us." El spat out, letting her tears spill over. It was easy to cry in front of him, he had seen her at her worst before. But for the first time in years, he was the reason for her soul breaking.

El launched herself in the direction of their bedroom door, fumbling for the knob until she harshly pried the door open. Before she could shut it in his face, his hand roughly swung the door back. "Get out, Mike," But he stood there, so achingly still. He looked lost, like if he moved the act alone would kill him.

Good, now he felt the exact pain she had when she found out the news. "Leave! Don't ever come back, I'm done with you." She was screaming. Pounding her small fists against the doorframe.

The tears were starting to burn El's cheeks but nothing could compare to the sting her heart felt at the sight of Mike in front of her. His black hair was dishevelled, his messy curls splattered across his forehead. Almost as if someone had run their fingers through them, almost as if someone was roughly pulling at them while they were being *fucked*. His lips looked red and swollen, like someone had been wanting to leave their mark on him. Yet it was his eyes that gave

everything away, they screamed cheater and she knew that these marks were all from Emily, not her.

"You've got to calm down, baby," he told her, catching both her wrists in one hand. "It was a mistake, if I could take it back I would. You've have to understand, I love you El. I always have." She traced the line of his hard jaw and she watched him drop his cheek to her hand, brushing against it slowly. She knew what she was doing would tear him apart, but he had to learn his lesson, cheaters don't get second chances.

El pulled her hand back so fast that all that could be heard was the sound of her slap echoing in the empty hallway. His head shot back sideways as he took a few steps back in alarm. "Don't you dare say that you love me. Tell me, did you think of me when you were fucking her?" El screamed out, her hands hitting every part of him she could reach. Angry claw marks made their way onto his pale skin, but he stood their letting her take out all the pain and anger. That made her even more furious. "Say something! Did you think of me when you fucked her in our bed? The bed we both lost our virginities to each other in? Let me guess, her pussy must have been what made you forget all about your *wife*." El spat out the last word as if it was poison to her tongue.

His gaze finally met with hers, and he gave her a sharp shake of the head before he dropped to his knees and sobbed. She let him reach for her, Mike rubbed his face into her clothed stomach, murmuring words that couldn't reach her ears. "What were you thinking? I don't want to be alone, how could you do this to us. I have loved you since I was a little girl. It's all ruined now, I hope your happy," El's voice broke before she continued on. "Because you lost me."

"God, El. No, no, no. You can't leave me. I won't let you." Mike cried out, hugging her even tighter than before. Her top was completely soaked from his tears, she almost believed he was genuinely sorry. But it wasn't enough.

Her heart jerked so fast in her chest, then began to pound as she knew it was time for her to let him go. "Mike, stop." The word's broke from El's throat like pieces of shattered glass were cutting her from the inside and out.

Tears continued to stream down his face. "But I love you," He trembled so hard that his whole body shook with his next words, "Isn't my love enough for you anymore?"

El shoved him so hard that his body sprawled out onto the floor. El's chest began heaving, her eyes burning from the unleashed tears. Words were desperately trying to claw their way out of her throat, her heart hanging heavy in her chest that she knew if she didn't leave soon she'd forgive him.

"You lost that right to love me the moment you decided to let another girl in our bed and into your heart."

XXXXXXXX

**Hey guys! I'll be making this into a short story, yes there will be some smut later on throughout the chapters! I hope you guys liked this so far, let me know what you enjoyed the most. Thanks for reading!**

L xo

## 2. Chapter 2

### Chapter Two

El's silently watching Mike from across their kitchen counter, all his clothes were messily sprawled out across the tiled floor. What caught her eye was how Mike seemed to react to El wanting him out of her life, his body had slid down onto the ground and he had his head in his hands. Her heart started to break then and there, at first it was supposed to be a simple game. A game that would make her feel less broken inside, and yet, it ended up breaking them both even more.

There are moments in every relationship that define when two people start to fall in love, for El though, her and Mike weren't the average couple. In fact, she had thought that their love couldn't be defined on paper or simple fact sheets. She once thought they could get through anything, but this scene in front of her proved her wrong. Just as El was about to push herself off the counter, Mike spoke and her heart shattered. "El, I know you don't owe me your forgiveness. Hell, if I were you I wouldn't forgive myself either but hear what I have to say," He looked away, a tear rolling down his cheek. "Please, don't do this. Don't walk away." He looked back at El desperately as she fought back a sob escaping the back of her throat.

El felt herself escaping further and further away from Mike's voice, deeper into the blackness that she once escaped from all those years ago. Here is where El let herself go, the tears kept on coming and she was utterly afraid they would never stop. She cried until she was gasping for breath, tears streaming down her already swollen face. As she cried over her heartache and knowing what she was really losing in the end, Mike. Her watched her, his face contorting in pain as if she was the one for his suffering.

"Explain." El's voice was cold and distant but her eyes remained on him.

El watched as he took a deep breath and tried to keep his voice steady as he spoke the next words, "I have loved you for years. The moment I had laid my eyes on you in the forest till the very next day when you let me name you," Mike swiped another tear that fell from

the corner of his eye, and a chuckle escaped as he pictured a small Eleven, covered in dirt and terrified. Yet, the second she saw Mike it was as if she knew he would rescue her. That their love would forever be madness, but they wouldn't have had it in any other way. Until he fucked up.

"I felt so privileged, I finally felt like I had someone who understand what was going on inside my head." he said with a shudder, "You knew all my thought's, my darkest emotions, and you still wanted me. I knew that I couldn't lose you again, it would break me El. You would be the end of me."

Then he quickly stood before he crossed over to where El stood still, until their foreheads were pressed tightly to each other's. She made an effort to move but he whispered a broken "Please." and no matter what her head was telling her, she couldn't leave him all alone. This was her Mike, even if they stood for a few mere seconds, she'd be forever happy. El felt his chest rumble against hers and she realised he was trying to calm down his frantic heartbeat as it was placed against hers, he needed to calm down if he wanted her to know every thought that was seeping into his head.

"Then graduation came, I was terrified. What if you realised you could do better than me? What if you saw potential in someone else? Would I let you go if I knew this person could make you happier than I ever could?" He buried his face in her low curls, inhaling deeply. "Would you sit back and watch your first love drift off into another guy's arms? Tell me El, what would you have done."

That's when something inside of El clicked, almost as if all the bones in her body snapped at once and she felt the most excruciating pain fill her veins. She pushed him off her with all her might, her cheeks flushed and her voice croaky. "I wouldn't have gone and fucked the first person who gave me the slightest bit of attention. I definitely wouldn't have broken up a love that I once thought could get past anything, so ask me again." She pushed him over and over until it was his back pressed against the kitchen counter top. He looked down at her as if he was a trapped animal and he was her awaiting prey. He looked terrified of her and she didn't like it one bit.

El's heart felt like it'd stopped-so that she could hear him mutter

those stupid words. He paused as he licked his lips as he asked her again, "What would you do?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing." Eleven's voice warbled with barely any emotion. "I wouldn't have been so goddamn insecure in myself or on this relationship. I wouldn't be babbling on about bullshit as to why you cheated on me like your willing to do in my face right now. Mike, just admit it!" Her voice shook with anger as she threw a pile of his clothes that had been on the floor to the empty suitcase that lingered next to the staircase. Her back was turned to him as she reached for more of his shirts, tearing them in the process but she didn't care. Her chest was heaving but that didn't stop him from reaching over and trying to pry her hands off his luggage, so she gave him another shove. Leading him closer to their patio and out of her life for good.

"You didn't fuck Emily because you feared losing me. You fucked her brains out because that's what you wanted to do in that moment. Don't you dare use me as the excuse." El took a moment to breathe, regaining her composure. She sounded so devastated that Mike looked like he didn't know what to say. She wanted him to see the damage he had caused inside of her; all the humiliation and pride began to flee from her body as she remembered defending her loving husband to her sister in law as she broke the news. After all, a wife should always believe their husband?

What a load of bullshit.

Mike held Eleven's gaze a bit longer and then broke into a fit of rage. His hands grasped on everything in his sight, all he could think about was breaking whatever was in his path. Lamps were busted, glasses that had been in the cabinets were now smashed to tiny fragments all over the kitchen that it left tiny little cuts on El's porcelain skin. She flinched as she felt the glass tear at her legs.

He stopped abruptly and blew a long, frustrated breath. "I didn't fuck her because I wanted her. I fucked the shit out of her to get out all my pain and anger that I've been holding in for so long. All my fucked-up insecurities that I thought you wouldn't be able to handle, I took it all out on her." His eye's locked with mine again and he flung both his hands to his curls, tugging on them roughly. "I fucked her so

hard that even when we were finished, I knew she'd still be feeling me inside her for days."

She flinched as if she had been slapped. She took a few staggering steps backwards that the back of her knees hit the stairs and she fell backwards. As she sat on the steps, the only movement to be seen was her chest swiftly going up and down. She felt as though she couldn't breathe, she couldn't even make eye contact with Mike without feeling the betrayal he had marked on her heart. "I fucked her because the way I touched her, it was so raw and primal, I couldn't be that way with you. You deserve to be treated so much better El, I didn't want to hurt you."

"You have no right to tell me how I should be treated," she said in a strangled voice. "Not when you're the person whose broken me to pieces," she added, and his face whitened as if she had no clue what those words had done to his heart.

The corner of her mouth twitched upward with satisfaction, knowing she was the one who was breaking Mike Wheeler from the inside out. She braced herself knowing what she was going to say next would be his undoing. "You have no idea how much you've crushed me, you may have loved me all those years ago, but you must certainly don't now. When you truly love someone, it's painful to imagine anyone else claiming my body the way you once did. I'd never thought these words would leave my mouth, yet, I'd rather fall in love with an ordinary man all over again then be with you. The boy whose saved me from my inner demons, who taught me what love was and helped me into the woman I am today. I'm grateful for *that* Mike, but this Mike standing in front of me? I don't know this man at all. He isn't my husband."

"You need to let me go!" She gripped his shirt as he leaned over her on the stairs and tried to shake him, tears falling from her eyes.

He touched her cheek, running his thumb over her tear stained lips. "I can't."

She knew what she had to do. Turning her whole body away from Mike, she swiped her tears with the pad of her thumb and hoisted herself off the stairs and towards the front door. All of a sudden, she

felt tired and trained, there wasn't enough fire in her anymore to keep the argument from going. Her slippers seemed to be the only thing that caught her attention as she fully stared down at them before saying, "How could I ever look at you the same knowing you let some stranger touch you?" she whispered.

Mike looked lost for words as his mouth opened a few times, only to close again.

*"Sometimes, love just isn't enough"*

**DUN DUN DUN**

**Hope you guys enjoyed it! Each chapter is supposed to be short, only a few remaining after this! Can I please get to six reviews for the next chapter my lovelies? Comment on what you liked the most and why?**

**L xo**

### 3. Chapter 3

She remembers *their* wedding day.

Their first moment's as Mr and Mrs Wheeler. "I love you, Mrs Wheeler." he breathed, eyes blazing as they both gazed on their wedding rings, signifying their undying love for one another. Music exploded around them, joyous cheers and laughter filling El's ears as Mike hoisted her off the floor and spun her around. Her heart was ready to burst at any second as she remembered Mike's body tensing as he asked Hooper for his approval of their engagement a few months back. Hooper thought Mike was a good kid, maybe even good enough for his little girl. Yet, at sixteen the pair already had a love so deep that it didn't surprise him at all that they wanted to elope so young.

A giggle escaped El's lips as Hooper's voice shook over the loud music, "Sorry to interrupt, but I was wondering if I could step in." He quickly cleared his throat, but it was his eye's that almost dared Mike for him to object his request. He was dressed in a simple white tux, he almost looked out of place without his sheriff's uniform on, but she didn't seem to mind one bit.

Reaching up to brush a wisp of hair that fell from her veil, "Of course." Mike added softly. "Be careful with my wife."

Hooper raised his eyebrows, struggling to hide his smile that was breaking out on his weathered face. "I'll make sure of it, *son*." Mike stiffened, heat rushing into his cheeks. He's always looked up to Hooper and he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride knowing he was now truly apart of El's family. So many feelings flooded through and spilled into El as she watched the two most important people in her life share a moment together. She couldn't contain her excitement any longer and threw her arms around their necks, squealing so loud in both of their ears that Hooper hissed in pain, but Mike laughed beside her, pressing a kiss against her temple.

Hooper was the first to draw back from her overly eager grip, "Alright, I think it's time for our dance." Hooper's expression changed as he watched El's face as Mike walked away from them. A few hands

began clasping against his back and a chorus of congratulations interrupted everyone's conversations as she saw Mike's face lit up as he got approval off the boys.

Once her gaze landed back on Hooper's she saw a spark of sadness emerge from his eyes, she knew she would have to start the dance off first without him breaking down in front of her. After losing his first daughter, El was all he had. He almost felt like he was beginning to lose another daughter all over again, that was until he noticed El's face watching Mike as he walked over to where Dustin and they others were, she looked at peace. That was all he ever wanted for his *girl*, if Mike Wheeler and his geeky friends were the reason behind her happiness then he would accept them with open arms.

They were breathless as they whirled around the dancefloor, laughter wedging from their throats as they moved to the rhythm of the music. To others, El and Hooper couldn't dance to save their lives. They were uncoordinated, both had two left feet and didn't know what to do with their hands. They couldn't care at all, they were smiling so hard that when El's dress got caught in between Hooper's legs they didn't notice Mike already by their side in a matter of seconds.

The next few seconds would've been messy and chaotic if it hadn't been for her husband. As the song was beginning to die down, El could feel her body starting to get tangled with Hooper's. A screech left her lips as she was ready for the impact of the fall to collide with her, until she felt a pair of hands grabbing her from behind. The smell of fresh pine wood filled her senses and she could point out that smell from a mile away, not to mention she could feel a small piece of metal press against the spine of her back.

As El slowly pried her eyes open she was meet with a pair of worried ones. She wasn't concerned about Mike not being able to hold her, over the years he had developed quite nicely that it didn't stop El from getting protective over Mike. He was hers and hers only and she wouldn't have it any other way.

He swiftly pulled her up and to him, pressing his sweating face deeply into the crook of her neck. Ushering sweet words of reassurance before he pulled back and examined her face for any

bruises or cuts. El bit back a gasp as she watched his level of concern for her rise each second that past, she knew she'd never regret marrying this man.

El realised she was finally *home*.

The memory began to fog from El's mind as she took in what was around her. It had been three weeks, three long weeks since she had seen Mike until today. Immediately when Mike had left the house El decided to ring up Hooper and explained everything to him. As Eleven expected, he cursed Mike ever name under the sun, but she sensed disappointment in his tone as he always thought Mike was a bright kid. He requested a lawyer for her by the name of Susan Myers. She was the best of the best, in other words she was El's one-way ticket out of Hawkins.

El's eyes widened in shock as her gaze landed on Mike's from across the table, his once luscious curls looked matted and dull. His skin looked so pale under the harsh bright light's in the lawyer's office that he looked barely alive and it was all because of *her*. He had always been skinny, but underneath his clothes he had grown into a new man with defined muscles that it made El's heart swell with love and her body turn into liquid. Yet now, he was simply a bag of bones.

She held back a gasp, the boy in front of her wasn't her husband at all, but a shell of him.

"My client, Mrs Wheeler has decided that all properties including their small cabin in Hawkins, their house, as well as any other items they bought in their marriage go to her husband." Miss Myers paused as she watched Mike's shoulders drop in defeat but that didn't stop him from leaving his chair and walking out that door. It teared him from the inside and out being here, he became desperate and needy, he needed to be wherever Eleven was. Even if it meant proceeding with their divorce.

"But, she has requested to keep her last name," Susan's voice dropped a bit, she felt a sense of pain for the man in front of her client. He looked terrible that she couldn't even imagine how he felt on the inside. She was shocked when Mrs Wheeler had stumbled upon her office three weeks ago, it was foreign for her to see such a young

woman already heading down the road of separation. Eleven had mentioned they were both nineteen and decided to get married at sixteen due to how much love they had for each other back then, that was until things started to change and she hadn't noticed within the three years. What broke Susan's heart further was the fact that after she had told this heartbreaking affair, she rooted for that boy to admit to El what an absolute twat he was but that she would always be *his girl*. His *first love*.

Eleven's heart started to pound. She met his dull eyes with her own. "Why are you doing this to us?" Mike choked out.

She wanted to be honest with him, even though he didn't deserve anything off her. "I'll let you keep everything else, I just want my name." she whispered.

"You mean my name." he began, leaning over the desk, "The name I gave you when you decided to become my wife. Why would you want my name when you don't want me? When you obviously don't want us anymore." Mike looked at her, narrowing his eyes as if he dared her to question him, and for a second she almost did.

"Stop it!" Eleven clapped her hands over her ears, then lowered them slowly. "Just stop." She whispered this time. Defeat swept inside El's mind that she scooted her chair closer To Miss Myers and away from Mike's leering form that was still hovering over her.

Susan continued, "My client doesn't want any of the assets as well as household items. She's requested for this to be done in a very short amount of time, Mr Wheeler with all due respect she's giving you everything. What's she's asking for isn't much at all."

*Please fight for her, fight for this relationship. Don't let her walk out those doors because once she's gone she certainly won't come back.*

Susan couldn't help but root for the deluded couple to get back together as she watched Mr Wheeler become even more battered and heartbroken as he looked like he was fighting an internal battle within himself. She didn't truly understand why she was getting herself emotionally involved, but after hearing from many at Hawkins about how obsessed these two were for each other and even

at such an early age when they were younger, she couldn't help but wish things would work out.

Mike laughed humourlessly as he slammed a fist down on the table, "I don't want the house, I don't want any of it I can't have you. I want my wife back, I want my life back."

*Yes! Don't back down. Show her that your willing to fight.* Susan cheered mentally but watched El's lips purse in anger as she watched him not back down.

There was a beat of silence after his voice stopped echoing around the room, yet no one dared to make a sound. Not even El.

He stood up, his chair screeching as he moved towards El's seat. His eyes were trained on her as he dropped to his knees of were she sat. Mike noticed El was discreetly playing with her wedding band, a habit she used to do whenever she was nervous. A habit she only did because of *him*.

"I'm sorry for not being a good husband, I'm sorry for not showing you everyday how much I loved you. But, I'm not done fighting for you, for this, for *us*. *I love you El Wheeler* and it may be too late. But I'll never stop loving you and this is exactly what I'm doing. I'm loving you, because if I didn't I would've walked away a long time ago." His hands lay flat on either side of him, his arms at his sides. He was barely breathing at this point as it took everything in his body to not reach over and grasp Eleven in his arms.

*He loved El. It was time he started to show her.*

"Goddammit El, let me fight for you. Let me love you all over again."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**Ugh**

I really liked this chapter and how it turned out, let me know if you guys did as well! Next chapter will be BIG AHHHH. Can I have 10 reviews? (Is that too much I have no clue hahaha) Have an awesome Mike and Eleven filled day my beautifuls!

**El xo**

## 4. Chapter 4

### AUTHORS NOTE:

Okay, so usually I do this at the end of the chapter, but I just wanted to say a few things to you guys about this story.

Yes, we all love mike and eleven together as a couple! And who knows, that could potentially happen within this story, but it may not as well. Some of you guys have your opinions about it being too angsty and that's so fine but at the same time imagine if you had gotten cheated on by the only person you've ever had in your life. So please try and see it through El's eyes, even in the show their love is heaps dramatic. What I'm saying is of course its sad and depressing right now otherwise if she just took Mike back then the story would be stupid.

Anyways, enjoy the chapter and have a merry Christmas!

L xo

*Just breathe.*

Eleven shut her eyes briefly and let out a strangled sigh as she skimmed her way through the busy streets of Hawkins. During Christmas season it always got awfully busy, everything became too *loud* and even the people became too *pushy* for El. As she quickly made her way through the chirpy crowds, her gaze landed on the tall-legged blonde behind the glass window of what was once her and Mike's old hangout spot.

It was a Café. It wasn't much, simple yet starting to get a little run down due to it being there for so long. She remembered their shared summer moments that consisted of cherry sundaes and secret kisses they had behind the booth in the corner of the seating area. Over the course of the last few weeks, El's emotions became stronger and she felt herself wanting to understand the reason behind why he'd cheat. Or in other terms, wanted to see what *Emily had that she didn't*.

She almost bolted right then and there, she truly did. She felt anger

crawling at the back of her throat, it's claws trying to wedge itself out of her body. With a violent shake of her head, she continued making her way towards the café. Every step closer was adding even more dread to her veins, as she pushed the creaky door open a small bell rung above her as she entered the cluttered space.

Eleven then bit down on her tongue so roughly that she could taste the blood filling her mouth. How could she describe the way Emily looked in this moment? A wave of insecurity clogged El's mind as she crossed her arms over her chest, her daisy patterned dress now brushing against the apex of her thighs. Her gaze drifted back to Emily. She was crouched down, handing a banana cream pie to a little girl who looked around five or so. They were both smiling, giggling even and she couldn't help but not hate this girl, or at least not yet. She was dressed in a reindeer costume, El couldn't even imagine what it would look like on her. She could picture the ridiculous looks and frowns she'd get off everyone in the town, not to mention the fact that to others she could still be considered a fourteen-year-old wearing that. But on Emily, she managed to pull off the look entirely. Like it was made for her in a way. In other words, Emily was the most beautiful girl this town had ever laid eyes on.

"Hi, can I help you --"Emily flashed her an apologetic smile as she realised who she had been serving next. "I'm sorry, El. Please forgive me, it's just that I hardly recognised you for a second. Gosh, it's been ages, right? How have you been?"

El didn't like the fact that Emily had called her El, that's what her loved ones called her, and Emily was nowhere near her list of friendships anytime soon. Did she already know about her and Mike's separation? Did the two of them laugh in bed together at her pain? Of how utterly clueless she was of Mike's cheating?

*Just breathe.*

"El? Are you okay? Maybe you should take a seat and I'll get you a glass of water, you're looking unwell." Emily asked, her soft voice dragging her back to the present. Eleven looked at the waitress and gave her a fake smile. *Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.* She reminded herself over and over before she jammed herself onto a stool directly opposite to where Emily was standing.

"I'll take that water if you don't mind." she said in a quiet voice.

Emily clapped a hand on Eleven's shoulder, almost in a comforting gesture before her hand was now replaced with a glass of water for El. In all seriousness, El in fact didn't want the beverage at all. What she wanted was to be further and further away from this girl, but she accepted the drink anyway, taking a small sip but never unlocking her eyes from Emily's.

Emily leaned towards her even further, the guilt in her eyes was beginning to cause Eleven to tremble in her seat. "So, what brings you by? Can't say I've seen you on this side of town for a long time." She said, refilling El's empty glass that she managed to chug down from nervousness.

She exhaled and dropped both her arms onto the counter, her fingers playing against the edge of her wedding ring. El could still picture her wedding day, every emotion was weighing down heavily on her heart that she decided enough was enough. She needed answers and she needed them *now*.

"Unfinished business is why I'm here, I need some answers and I need them fast. Would you care to help me?" Her voice was void of all emotion. Instantly a guilty blush spread over Emily's cheeks, that it took everything in her being to not use her powers against her and break her neck.

"I don't see how I could help you but I'm willing to try. What's the-"

El cut her off quick and fast, "How well do you know my husband?" El's tone remained calm and collected but it's what was swirling in her eyes that had Emily push herself off the counter and further away from her.

*You've got this. Don't back down now.*

"What do you mean? I'm friends with him but-" She stopped suddenly and looked around nervously, almost as though she needed help. *Help in getting rid of El perhaps.* She licked her lower lip but avoided all eye contact with her, deciding that the floor was a hell of a lot more interesting than Eleven. "What is this really about?"

All that could be heard was the scrape of the stool's legs being pulled back harshly as her body left the seat. El's hand slammed down on the marble counter so hard that the room went entirely quiet all together. "What I'm saying is, when did you think it would be okay to fuck my husband?"

Emily shook in fear, her eye's widening as the look of horror edged its way on her face. At first, all that could be heard was endless apologies coming from her mouth, then the tears began to fall drastically, and then the sobs left her throat quicker than Eleven expected. Her hand flashed out before she'd thought about it, the slap vibrating against her palm even once it was over. Emily held her cheek, El was expecting to be kicked out or perhaps awaiting a hit back from her. Emily did none of those things, she stood their tear-stained and frozen before Eleven noticed acceptance was filling Emily's eyes. She watched as her shoulders dropped, and she tore off the reindeer ears swiftly off her head. "I deserve that."

All Eleven could do was nod, noticing she had gained more attention than she anticipated. She decided sitting across from Emily once again would be a lot better than being the centre of attention. People talk in Hawkins, nothing interesting ever happened in this remote town that she knew if she kept this up, Mike would find out all about her little visit. After a few silencing beats played out within the Café, she returned to the empty stool and sipped her water contently.

"You did." Eleven agreed softly, brushing a piece of hair that fell out from her braid, she continued on, "Let me ask you this one thing. Who came onto who? Who was the one that started everything." She marvelled at the emotions that were springing up inside of her. She was so scared, scared couldn't even describe the unbearable pain of finding out what really had happened between those two. She felt herself quickly wiping away the tears that spilled out from the corners of her eyes before her gaze locked back with Emily's.

"It was me," Emily bowed her head, almost ashamed, her once chirpy voice had changed to mousy. "I saw the way he looked at you, no other guy has ever looked at me with such love the way Mike did to you. I was jealous, insanely jealous, I couldn't stop thinking about how happy you both looked together." She threw her face into her palms, her voice now muffled but luckily enough for Eleven her

powers helped her hear.

"At first, I tried to let it go. Believe me, Eleven I honestly tried. But you got everything I've always wanted, and you didn't even have to try. You had a boy who worshipped the ground you walked on, and I wanted that, I wanted the love you both had for each other and, so I did what I've always been best at doing. I used my body in what I thought was a good idea, it only got so far, and in the end, we both broke down and cried." Emily pushed herself away from her soaked hands and brushed them brutally against her green dress before she shakily murmured, "I cried for being so stupid into thinking what I did was right, I had felt so guilty after it that I showered myself straight after. Mike though? He cried for what felt like hours, I heard every scream and plea he let out. He didn't mean any of it El, he loves you so much!"

El scrambled to get her belongings, she had heard quite enough, she needed to leave. She felt the walls of the Café closing in on her greedily, all her breath was knocked out of her that if she didn't get fresh air she was worried what she would do next. "Eleven, please, wait!"

Her braid whipped around the back of her head so fast as her face was flushed with red and her teeth almost bared. "I suggest you get away from me, otherwise I don't know if I'll be able to hold myself back the next time you speak."

Emily's eyes flew wide. She searched El's face for lies but once she realised that she was being serious, she threw both her hands up almost in a surrendering stance before mutely nodding.

"When a man loves a woman, he certainly doesn't fall for some pathetic girl who throws herself at any guy willing to give her attention. Most importantly, the Mike I once knew wouldn't have even turned his head to look at you. So, congratulations, whatever you did must've worked. But for your sake, I'd be very scared." She was trembling now. She wrapped both arms around herself to fight the emotion that was consuming her heavily.

"If you go near Mike again or even remotely breath in his direction. I will not hesitate to kill you, do you understand?" Her voice was low

but carried malice, "If I find out from anyone that you've told him about our little meeting, I'll show you what it really feel's like to be a worthless little girl in this world. Trust me on that."

*She was done. She was done being the timid girl, she was over the endless heart ache Mike made her consume every day. Payback was a bitch and it was now time Mike really knew how much he fucked up.*

## 5. Chapter 5

### AUTHORS NOTE:

SOME SMUT WILL BE IN THIS CHAPTER (WARNING IF YOU GUYS DON'T LIKE IT)

Hope you had a very merry Christmas! May 2018 be the year of changes and better attitudes my darlings. Also, if it's alright with you guys could I please have 10 comments for the next chapter. I think that's fair?

Please tell me how you guys are feeling so far with the story and have a very Mike and Eleven filled day/night!

L x

The pain in El's lungs began to burn her from the inside out. She didn't know where she was going, her legs kept running, further and further away from that Café and away from Emily. El's face was fully flushed a deep red, her fists beginning to clench at her sides achingly. Her legs already becoming tired and sore but that didn't stop her. No, she needed Mike to feel her pain. She felt herself beginning to wither away and she was scared.

Each footstep she took creaked against the old wooden steps of the house she was once welcomed in. She wanted to get on her knees and scream, cry out all her agony and grief but most of all she wanted someone to be punished. Eleven didn't even think twice about what her next step was, she grasped for the key that was kept hidden under the doormat for emergencies only.

Well fuck, to El *it really was one.*

"Mike!" El cried relentlessly, her body trembling as her tired eyes scanned around the living room, but it seemed vacant. *No, no, no*, she needed to find him right now. El scurried up the steps, she felt as though she couldn't control her body for what was going to happen within the next few seconds. She craved to feel anything other than constant pain, she needed to feel loved. Even if it was for a short

while. "Mike, I need to speak to you." She pleaded, she knew she looked like an absolute lunatic, but she wanted to get rid of the burning feeling in the pit of her stomach. She needed him to make it all go away.

As she got further towards his room, her heart began to pound, and she almost felt as though she lost the ability to speak. This was her Mike for fucksake, her husband, why was she so nervous suddenly?

Her brain couldn't function anymore without him, she craved him. Craved couldn't describe the feelings bubbling deep within her stomach. Her ears picked up the sound of the water running in his bathroom, she dashed in without a second thought.

*She could do this.*

Within a second, she pushed apart the curtains so fast that Mike yelped a "Fuck!" before he realised it was *his girl*. *It was El*. She couldn't hold herself back any longer, she stepped fully clothed inside the shower with him. They stared at each other for what felt like hours before she grasped the back of his drenched hair and kissed him hard. Mike stifled a groan as he hoisted her up against the shower wall and began latching his mouth onto her neck.

She wanted to shout out at him, to tell him that once he had walked out the front door she couldn't recognise the girl she once was anymore. She grasped his hair and tugged at it, El watched as his teeth clenched in pain, but he continued to let her hurt him. To use his body and to use his soul. They both needed each other desperately, it wasn't just a want anymore, it was a constant reminder that only their bodies could react to each other's touch like this.

Mike's fingers laced with El's softly before pulling them above her head, keeping her in a tight grip. Need flashed in Eleven's eyes as she watched Mike desperately yank down her dress straps, freeing her perky breasts. Mike licked his lips, almost as if he was about to devour her, like she was his last meal. Without a second thought El let out a whimper as she watched him lightly blow on both of her nipples slowly, before taking her left nipple in his mouth greedily. Pleasure coursed through her body as he continued to trace her nipple with the tip of his tongue. "Fuck, I missed you so much." Mike

gasped, placing his head between her breasts that the sensation of his wet curls shot pleasure straight down to her pussy. She imagined his face between her blushed thighs, her back arching against the shower wall and Mike hungrily thrusting his tongue inside her that she cried out in pure ecstasy just imagining it. Mike took this as an opportunity to completely peel off Eleven's dress all together as he watched El throw back her head in pleasure. God, she was so beautiful. The way her mouth formed an O when she was about to cum, or the way her eyebrows would pull in together when she was fighting back a gasp as Mike was doing wicked things to her body.

Both of there chests began heaving uncontrollably, their bodies pressed up against one another's, both were slicked with the mixture of water and sweat. "Tell me, sweetheart. Did you miss me?"

Eleven whimpered in response as she felt Mike's fingers brush against the sides of her thighs, tickling her in a way that brought her pain and a sense of liking she's never felt before. "No." she managed to squeeze out, her abruptly stopped and she cried out in protest.

She hears him draw in a breath and says, "Are you sure about that? Because your body is telling me otherwise." Mike continues to pin her wrists above her head, waiting for her to deny everything. He knew she wanted him just as much as he did with El. Fuck, he could cum right then and there watching her flushed underneath his penetrating gaze.

"Let's just get this *over with*."

He let go of her so suddenly that El gasped in shock as her naked back slipped against the cold tiles. She saw Mike retreat away from her, almost as if her presence was making everything worse. Maybe it was, but she didn't care in the slightest bit. She wanted to see the destruction pool in his eyes, El wanted to memorise every detail of his glorious face which turned from love to heartbreak within a heartbeat.

"What are you doing to us? Why did you come here, huh? Was it to make me beg?" Everything else seemed to go silent and fade away, and all El seemed to hear was the sounds of Mike blinking away his tears, threatening to escape. What was shocking for El, is that it

didn't pull against her heartstrings like it once would of, instead it made her feel a sense of power.

Suddenly, she felt as though her time was up with Mike. She began to reach for her daisy dress that rested bunched up against the floor, but it got snatched away from her brutally. "NO! You can't leave me, not again. I won't let you." He continuously cried out, his eye's lifeless and the only pain El had felt was her chest beginning to fill weighed down.

Her heart seemed to skip a beat and then it slowed. "Give me back my dress.' El murmured. It was a bad idea coming here, that she knew, but seeing the devastation Mike had wedged against his features made Eleven feel joyous. She knew this could only go so far, she wanted him to suffer just as bad as she was after finding out the news.

Mike sunk to his knees in front of her, naked and vulnerable. They both were and El was left speechless. "Everyday I think about what I did to you- seeing you here. I can't stand to be apart from you, please don't go. I'll do anything." He then covered his face against her pale thighs, inhaling her scent that was a mixture between lilies and earlier wetness from what had happened moments ago between them.

He pried himself away from her body and locked eyes with *his wife*. The girl of his dreams since he was a little boy, the moment he saw her in the woods that's when he knew she'd be the girl he'd marry one day. "God, baby," His voice broke. "I'm a mess without you. Can't you see that."

Eleven pushed him off her altogether before helping him swiftly stand. She guided his face towards hers, their lips barely touching but it was enough for Mike to feel himself slowly melting into her comforting touch.

*Oh, how wrong he was.*

*"Sucks doesn't it? Feels like your world is slowly crumbling around you and you can't do a simple thing to stop it. This is what true heartbreak is Mike, this is what you did to me."*

## 6. Chapter 6

El began humming to the music that was swiftly playing inside some small grocery store, a few minutes away from her regular one. She had never been there before, in fact, she distinctively came here to hide from Mike. It was sad really, she attempted new routes and found herself shopping in different places she least expected, so she didn't have to bump into him.

Today was different. She didn't feel tired and drained, she was over her usual routine that consisted of different flavoured egos and watching sappy movies all day long. Even Joyce had made a few attempts to get her off the bed and out the front door, El knew she looked pathetic at this point but she just couldn't help it. Not when she felt as though the walls were closing in on her and no one was around to stop it. To stop her from feeling scared and alone, but Mike did. He was her anchor, making sure she stayed grounded but most importantly he made her feel loved. But it wasn't fair on her to dwell on old memories and tire out her body even more by crying.

Something inside Eleven snapped this morning, she had surged off the bed and into her bedroom closest. She tore through each and every outfit until she found the perfect one, it was white and had consisted of patterned Daisy's splattering across it. She loved this dress, it made her feel all girly and pretty. Right now, this is exactly what she needed. With a nod of approval, she marched her way to the bathroom next, she bit back a gasp at the mirroring image of herself.

Her short locks were so matted that it was piled up against the top of her head, unbrushed and unkept. Her lifeless eyes were glassy and almost swollen shut, she hadn't not cried a single day since being a way from Mike. She was used to him being around, she never had felt so empty, so alone. Her gaze then landed on her skin, looking washed out and pale under the harsh lights. All together she was a complete and utter mess.

No wonder Mike cheated, she thought bitterly. Not everyone can wake up in the morning and still be able to glow the way Emily did.

But goddamn it, she was heartbroken, and she had every right to feel and look hopelessly miserable.

Not anymore though.

*Enough was enough.*

Her cheeks became flushed and her breathing uneven, suddenly her hands flew to her hair. She let out a strangled "Fuck" as she hissed through her teeth. She pulled and yanked at the knots, teasing it with the ends of her fingers.

Yes, she liked it.

In fact, she loved it.

It was different, her once perfectly placed curls were now replaced with a more wild and messy look. El started to feel something swell within herself, perhaps it was pride for dragging herself out of bed or maybe it was the fact that while everyday she cried, it had helped her forget a little about Mike each time.

A smile made its way across her pale complexion as she then grasped a pink gloss that was scattered across the sink of where she kept all her make up. Nancy had helped and taught El what she should buy over the last few years, but she never got the chance to wear most of it. Mike liked El for the way she was, he didn't want her to hide her natural beauty, so she did as she was told and kept herself a certain way for him. With a shake of her head, she pouted her lips and applied a generous amount on her forefinger before dabbing softly.

Not anymore. She wasn't going to be the same old El. She needed a change and she needed it now.

And that's how she ended up here. At some random grocery store, looking all glammed up for the first time in awhile. Yet, for the first time she seemed at peace. She wasn't dolling herself up for anyone except for herself only and she loved it. A lot of new firsts were happening today without Mike and she didn't seem to mind, not one little bit.

El was kind of getting over the Eggos at this point, don't get her

wrong she loved them. In fact, usually she couldn't get enough but she was sick to death of everywhere she went she would be surrounded by him without even realising it. She didn't just need a fresh look, she needed a new life. One that didn't consist of him anymore.

A sigh escaped her lips as she wandered away from the eggos and ended up grabbing a few things Hopper asked off her instead for their dinner party tonight. It wasn't anything too fancy, but to El this was a huge step. For once she was acting completely normal and not some insane girl who couldn't keep herself together without bursting into a puddle of tears.

With her head held high and both her arms filled with groceries, she made her way out of the sliding doors and towards her parked car. El let out a frustrated sigh as her car was only across the road from her. That wasn't the issue though, it was the fact that it was so humid in Hawkins that El thought she could melt right then and there. As her eyes scanned the road, it seemed good to go for her to cross it. She quickly scurried by, almost at the end of the road until one of her heels got caught in a pothole.

"No, no, no." She ushered out worriedly, her eyes frantically watching if there was a sign of a car coming anytime soon. It was clear so far.

She tried yanking and pulling at the shoe, but it wouldn't bulge and El felt her heart beginning to surge out of her chest. This was bad. Really bad.

All El could do was pull even harder on the straps, dropping the groceries down in the process. Her breathing hitched as she could hear the cars coming closer.

"Get off the road, unless your wanting to get killed out there!"

She heard someone scream in the distant but El didn't seem to pay close enough attention. El squeezed her eyes shut, everything seemed to freeze within this moment and El remained still. She felt unfamiliar hands making their way under her legs and her head was now pressed against a stranger's chest. So warm and inviting.

El's vision suddenly became blurry, her head pounding and her body aching. Her ears picked up the sounds of someone screaming and the skidding of a car against the pavement. Thanks to her powers, El could use them from miles away but instead she's stopped herself from doing so. She rarely uses her powers anymore.

"Are you okay?" El felt a hand brush against her cheek, her eyelashes fluttering in the process. She fought herself awake, this stranger's touch surprisingly made her feel safer and secured than she had in a long time. El eyes started to lock on a pair of worried ones. His glossy blonde hair was dishevelled, but it was his baby blue eyes that made El bite back a gasp and instead lean further into him. Mike had always been beautiful to El. But my god, who was this guy?

Hell, Mike was the centre of El's world and she never noticed anyone that wasn't him.

Until now.

"You saved my shoe." El's words were slurred and unsteady but it was his deep chuckle that had her melt into his touch even further. What was she doing? Usually El would've never let a guy remotely touch her but she sensed no danger. For crying out loud, here she was complaining when he had just saved her life. Her eyes landed on one of her heels dangling on his unpreoccupied hand. She felt a hint of embarrassment but remained puddle under his touch.

"And you as well." He added, a small smile hinged its way onto his features before he swiftly pulled her off the side of the road and onto him. His eyes were scanning for any minor injuries that El shook the thought of her wedding day away from her mind. The act alone reminded her of Mike and for once she didn't want him to ruin this moment with this perfect stranger.

Without a second thought El blurted out, "Who should I be thanking?"

His hands remained on her, but she didn't do a single thing to stop him. Maybe she craved a little intimacy and to others the way they appear may seem as though there together, but she didn't care. After all, why couldn't she be in the arms of another guy. She was single

after all.

"The names Ben." He released his hands off her suddenly, beginning to rub the back of his neck softly. El didn't like the cold feeling that was now replacing his warm touch.

"Ben." El repeated the word again, liking the way it clicked against her tongue and the warm feeling that emerged from her stomach as she repeated his name a few more times in her mind.

"And you are?"

She began to open her mouth, but she chocked on her words as her eyes gazed on his watch. Fuck, she was already so late. Joyce would kill her.

"Late. Really late actually. I've got to go but thank you for everything, really." El crouched down to collect her bags before she felt a hand press against the edge of her foot.

There he was, kneeling in front of her. She felt her eyebrows pull together in confusion before she saw her shoe still hanging in his grip. With a gentle tug, he slid the shoe against her foot and placed a soft kiss against the small graze of her big toe.

As he finally got back on his feet, El didn't seem to move. His smile was still plastered across his face, but his eyes held a playful glint in them that El quickly grabbed her things and headed towards her car finally.

"Wait!"

El's curls brushed against the sides of her neck as she hastily turned around. Both of his hands were inside his jean pockets but instead she was the one to offer a sweet smile as he muttered the next words, "Will I be seeing you around, Miss Late?"

Eleven giggled at his choice of words before she subconsciously agreed a thousand times in her head.

*Yes! Yes! Yes!*

"I guess we will just have to wait and see, shall we."

Not giving him a moment to reply, she got into her car and shut the door with a thud. Her head was thrown back against the leather car seat and her chest was frantically beating so fast that El was already pressing a hand to her chest. Beginning to count down from ten to handle her breathing.

*Ben.*

El repeated the name over and over without a second thought. He was a complete and utter stranger to her, but she hadn't felt so alive with anyone that hadn't been her husband. It was the sweetest thing and she knew it was all because of Ben.

Yes, she would certainly be seeing him again.

*She'd make sure of it.*

XXXXXXXXXX

**AND THAT'S IT.**

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, I think it's time to not let it be so depressing. The beginning of the story was going to be filled with angst no matter what but it's time for it to be more light felt and exciting. Do tell me what you guys think? I love the big and long reviews, it makes me feel super warm inside and appreciated. I used to always think my writing skills sucked but you guys make me think differently now!

**So kudos to you beautiful people!**

**Was it too soon to bring a guy into this? Thoughts? Don't worry we will be seeing a lot of Mike in the other chapter!**

**L xo**

## 7. Chapter 7

El couldn't seem to wipe the undeniable smile that's been lingering on her lips since she left the grocery store.

And it was all because of him, because of Ben.

Her fingers were continuously tapping against the steering wheel and all that could be heard was El's tone deaf screeches echoing from her beaten-up car.

A silly love song was playing on her favourite radio station and for once she decided to go along with it, so that's exactly what she did.

Even as moments passed and more lyrics seemed to spill out of her lips, her mind effortlessly brought her back to him.

To Mike.

Her pulse began to fasten just by the sheer mention of his name. For weeks, she continued to ignore his frantic pleads over the phone, he called every single day and it infuriated her. It was like he was trying to prove a point, that she couldn't get rid of him even if she tried. She was stuck.

The car began to pick up speed and El noticed a tingly sensation swell within her chest. But this time it wasn't because of Mike, it was for someone else. The thought alone scared her, Mike was all she had ever known.

He was her first kiss.

Her first boyfriend.

The first person she ever whispered the words 'I love you' too.

And now, he was her soon to be ex husband and she couldn't help but feel like the same lost little girl she was when Mike found lurking behind the trees. She remembers being petrified beyond belief, her body shaking at an alarming rate and her breathing shortening as she heard more steps making their way towards her.

Piercing white flashes had invaded her vision and she bite back a gasp as her eyes began adjusting to the three young boys in front of her, holding flashlights. She remembers Dustin, with his toothless grin that still to this day seemed to brighten El's mood no matter what. Next was Lucas. His face had contorted to annoyance at the sight of her yet over the years she had seemed to grow on him.

Finally, she had met a pair of brown eyes against her own. His eyes had locked with hers frantically, searching for any sign of an answer as to why she was here. His hair had been drenched against his forehead, but El could still see the curls beginning to form. His hair matched his dark eyes, deep swirling piles of nothingness that made her numb. It was as if before they had met, they were just as alone and lost as each other.

She shook the thought out of her head as her tyres stopped at a halt.

El began clutching her hands into frantic, uncomfortable fits. Her lips had started to part, but no sounds seemed to emerge from them.

She needed a moment to breathe, to collect herself and her stupid, stupid emotions and remember that she couldn't afford to act this way. Not tonight at least, it was Joyce's annual Christmas dinner and she wouldn't allow herself to ruin it.

But what was Mikes car doing in her driveway?

As El attempted calming herself down but failing miserably, she quickly turned the engine off before shutting her car door with a loud thud. It was so alarmingly loud that the neighbours could've easily had heard it themselves.

"Sweetheart." Her heart had seemed to have stopped within this moment. Only one person in the entire world had ever called her by that name. She watched in a daze, as a pair of hands swiftly turned her rigid body to face theirs.

She knew that body, had felt that body a million times against her own.

"Mike." She breathed out, her heart feeling heavy all of a sudden. He

still looked as breathtakingly beautiful as ever, and that alone seemed to infuriate her even more.

She wanted to laugh, wanted to scream, a thousand jumbled thoughts were racing through her mind and seeing him like this in front of her wasn't helping El think clearly at all.

"What are you doing here?" She ground out. El was already rambling, desperate to escape him, and he was studying her with an almost paralysing sadness on his unquestionably handsome face.

"I came to see you, I wanted to speak with you but you've been ignoring my calls for weeks." He murmured, his hands thrust into his pockets, the sleeves of his pale grey shirt folded back over his forearms. His navy tie hung loosely around his sculpted neck, disappearing into the top of his wool vest.

"El, please talk to me. This is crazy! Can't you see what this is doing to me? What your actions have done to us?" His expression hadn't changed, but she saw hurt pooling in his eyes.

She wounded him.

"Do you really want to talk?" She whispers, her own breath wedged inside her throat. He touches her cheek with the tips of his fingers.

"I just can't stand to look at you, much less be in the same room as you." She pried his fingers off her cheeks suddenly. He wrinkled his nose at her choice of words, and it was utterly adorable.

*And there you go falling into the same habit, same trap all over again. Just stop.*

"You broke me. I lost a piece of myself the moment I found out you cheated. I'd never wish this pain on anyone, I feel myself breaking within every moment that I wish I was still sleeping beside you." El calms her breathing again for what seemed the hundred time that day before continuing on, "Then I wake up every morning in my childhood bed and realise you were the one who drove me right back here."

His hard expression faltered and El nervously ran her tongue along

the edge of her teeth.

"I'm so stupid," he muttered to himself so faintly that she wouldn't of been able to of heard him if she hadn't been across his lingering form. He began leaning forward, his breath hot and heavy fanning against El's stilled face as his lips edged its way to the shell of her ear. "It doesn't have to be this way El, let me take you home. I know I can fix this-"

El felt a small sad smile tilt up the corners of her mouth. Oh how wrong he was, so incredibly wrong.

"That's just it," She sucked in a deep breath, " I am home, and from this day forward my life is none of your concern. At least not anymore."

She saw his eyes narrow at her sudden abruptness, she then attempted in her hardest voice, "You need to leave."

"El, hurry up and get inside honey. I need your opinion on a few things," She quickly glances at Joyce. The anger had faded from Elevens eyes and were now filled with adoration as she watched Joyce lean against the front door, her arms crossed over her chest.

"I'm sorry Mrs Hooper, I was just leaving-"

"Nonsense, you'll be staying for dinner. And call me Joyce, there's no need for you to start calling me differently. You never have before."

El sighed in annoyance and threw her arm over her eyes. Silence reigned for a full minute, the only sounds left where the heavy breaths that were escaping both of there mouths. She caught her lower lip between her teeth, which had begun to tremble, El's voice was barely above a whisper, "I don't know if that's such a good idea."

El's heartbeat ripples inside her chest and then swoops through her whole body, feeling a tingly sensation, not at all the good kind.

This cannot be happening.

"I'd love to Joyce." He managed to squeak out, a warm smile had soon spread across his face as Mike began making three quick strides

to the front door. Joyce returned his smile with a small pat on the back before her eyes were watching his retreating form head further into the house.

It was just El and Joyce now.

"Are you crazy? Why would you do that!" El said, her head jerking up to look into Joyce's as she frantically walked up the drive way.

"It's time, baby."

She remained silent. There was nothing left for her to say, loneliness swarmed around El as she watched Mike from the front window. Will had embraced Mike in a warm hug and she wondered bitterly if he'd still be doing that once he found out what Mike had done. Frantic thought's filled her mind, they were desperate and wanted to be heard by somebody. Anybody.

El watched as Joyce took a deep shuddering breath and her eyebrows pulled in together. "Since Hopper is out of town, I've decided to take matters into my own hands and invite Mike to dinner. After all, he's been like a son to me. I'm sure he has a lot to fill me in on." She said in a soft voice.

"About his infidelities on his wife, I'm sure."

"Oh, for the love of—" Mum managed to bite her tongue a split second before she snapped, "Speak to the boy! I've watched you for weeks looking broken and nows your chance for answers. Do it for yourself at least."

Tears started to swell behind El's eyes as she continued peering at Mike through the window.

God, He was tall.

Tall and broad-shouldered but slender, with breathtakingly clear skin. His hair, black and so utterly tempting that El forced herself not to run her hands through his untamed tresses.

And those lips, laced with red and held every meaningful goddamn word that he said to her, all were lies. Every last one of them.

He was everything perfection stood for and he knew it, the whole world knew it and she had once thought it too.

"You need to forgive him, I'm right about this. If you can't love him, then forgive him before things get worse. The only good thing I saw in that boy was his love for you, it was undying and I envied it. Even when you were a little girl, he was always there somehow. It was as if he was meant to be in your life, El."

El finally latched back onto Joyce's gaze, She tried to catch her breath, She failed. Fuck.

She sighs in frustration before she eases off the door and over to El. Her hands started grasping El's shoulders as she looked at her with such intensity that El's mouth stayed wide open the entire time she spoke. "He's had time to reflect and heal since you've been gone but you haven't. You're still trapped with all that hatred. Hear what he has to say, for both your sakes. You need to forgive him, you need to forgive yourself. Then you can properly move on, without him."

*Without him. I've been without him for the last few months, I can do it for many more. El tells herself. She can, can't she?*

Joyce looked at El strangely before it finally dawned on her, "Oh no, baby. You have to let him go. For the sake of both of you, don't ruin what you guys had. It can't get better from here, only ugly."

El still didn't say anything. How could she? Everything was getting worse and all she could do was sit back and watch the rest unfold in front of her.

Joyce gave a reassuring smile, placing her fingers on El's hand and gently tracing small circles with the edge of her thumb, creating little tiny patterns against it.

Tiredness hit El then, like a wave, slowly, than all at once.

El felt herself drowning in the memories, of Hoppers sudden disapproval of Mike once he heard El's soft sobs over the phone and now Mike making a sudden appearance in her life once again. "Tell me it gets better from here, please." El whispered, Joyce gave me her

a look filled with so much sadness that a knot formed in her stomach.

"Thing's will only get better once you speak to him, let him grieve. He didn't just lose all his friends and family, he lost his first love. He lost you." Joyce reached out and captured her hand in hers, again. Raising it to her lips, she pressed a kiss to El's palm before letting her hand fall to her side slowly.

"I know, it's just so hard." She blew out, pleased that her voice didn't tremble.

She needed to let him go

XXXXXXXXXX

**Authors note:** Hey guys, hope all is well and you enjoyed this chapter. Sorry for it being so late in updating but the wifi has been playing up where I live! Anyways the song for this chapter is 'The man who can't be moved' by the scripts! Should I make a playlist for the story? Let me know in the comments and also do you guys so far prefer mike or Ben?

L xx

## 8. Chapter 8

"El, let's go inside before we both catch a cold out here." Joyce murmurs, giving her half a smile. It was filled with such warmth and adoration that it took everything in El's power not to shatter in front of her.

*Oh, if only it was that easy.*

Joyce formed a puzzled expression as her hazel eyes continued to bore into El's. Joyce remained still against the doorframe, her arms were outstretched, almost as a silent plea for El to go inside and confront him.

Confront Mike.

"No, I'm not ready. It's still too soon, I can't do this-" El cut herself short as she felt something undefinably tragic swell up inside her chest. She could feel tremendous pain lurking within her, each hitched breath felt like her ribs were slowly cracking and her lungs collapsing.

"I won't do this." Her words came out strangled and a lump had formed inside El's throat. Her head lurched forward as her eyes matched against a pair of black ones. There he was suddenly beside Will, adding one of his signature smiles against his lips which used to be reserved only for her, now for all she knew it could belong to another. Or more importantly, belong to Emily.

"Are you coming inside, sweetheart? Will and I are starving. I can definitely say that I have missed your famous dinners, Joyce. El just can't seem to cook the way you do, have you seen her in the kitchen? It's like a war zone, I'm telling you." El had to bite back her tongue as she felt hatred boiling against the tip of it before it finally dawned on her.

Will had no clue about what Mike had done to her.

He was simply acting.

She wasn't about to let him drag Will into there own stupid mess, she wouldn't allow him to ruin anything else in her miserable excuse of a life. Yes, so far her life had only seemed to consist of restless sleeps and loneliness spurring on her at the most random of times. But it was her life and for once she wasn't going to let him control any ounce of her being, not anymore. Suddenly she was beyond furious. Who did he think he was?

"I've got to get out of here, I'm sorry. I'll call you two later on, something's seemed to happen at work and it turns out they need me more than ever." El says tightly.

Will began shooting El worried glances as his eyes remained alert between the couple. His lips parted, but it's what his eyes gave away that made El all of a sudden feel sick to her stomach. Wills eyes reflected to confusion, hurt then as his gaze swiftly landed on Mike; it turned to shock. Will's quiet for several moments, just as El was about to usher out countless apologies, he adds silently, "But El, I've hardly gotten to talk to you since I've been back home. You know I've been looking forward to this for months, something is going on that your not telling me. I just know it."

Both El and Mike say nothing. Will's mouth twists as he attempts to hide his frustration before his voice finally rises, "What are you guys hiding from me? Is someone hurt? Is that it? Did someone that we know die?"

"No, no. It's not like that, El's just been feeling a little bit stressed lately. Works been keeping her busy, hasn't it?" Joyce murmurs, running her free hand against the bridge of his back, in attempts to sooth him.

Instead it only seemed to anger Will more.

"You're all lying to me, if it's not death then what could possibly be worse?"

El suddenly stiffens, her voice is barely audible as she mutters the next few words, "Will, everything is fine. Really, it is. Management has been letting go of people recently and they've been asking me to do a few extra hours. I'm sorry that I can't stay, I-" She halts.

Will shakes his head in exasperation, his lips beginning to form into a sad smile. "El, don't forget we were once close. I know when you're lying to me. Will you please give this a rest already and tell me what is really going on, please?"

El swallows hard, how could she resist when he was laying down his puppy eyes. What a smart boy, she thought.

El could feel her body tensing as she pictured what the next few seconds would be like. She prepared herself for the worst, for screams to echo against her ears and for arms to pry her inside the house. Instead, it was Mike who interrupted her thoughts this time. "El's pregnant." He breathes out steadily, his composure remaining the same. Cool, calm and collected while El could feel herself becoming woozy and light headed.

*What the actual fuck?*

Sometimes, El just wished Mike would shut the fuck up. For how smart he was on paper, it still continued to amaze her that he could say the dumbest things.

At the worst moment possible.

"Surprise?" El whispers encouragingly, her voice both patchy and rough.

No, she can't cry now. If she cries, Mike would say it's because of her crazy hormones and knowing Will, he'd be ecstatic to become an uncle. Why didn't she walk away when she had the chance to?

*This is all so terribly wrong.*

Mike shifts his attention off Will and back onto El, surprise crawls it's way onto his features. He wasn't just shocked at what he'd done but more along the fact that she silently agreed to go along with it.

"Oh, El. You shouldn't be working yourself to the core. I'm sure it wouldn't be healthy for the baby, would it?" Will asks, concern wedged in his voice.

How could El answer him when she wasn't even pregnant to begin

with.

He frowns and continues to stare at El, waiting patiently for her to reply but for once she's grateful that Mike intervenes. Unfortunately, she just wasn't as good of a liar as her darling husband was.

Must've been practice from all the late nights he would call her, ushering mumbled sentences that consisted of his work being overdue and how instead he wished that he was at home, in bed with her. But in reality, he had made her become a complete and utter fool.

"I've been trying to get El to quit her job for awhile but you know how she is. Once she's passionate about something, she won't stop. Not even for the baby." Mike suddenly reaches over and caress her belly.

If anyone would have asked her once what she thought of having a baby with Mike would be, she would have endlessly cried a thousand tears and sighed in contentment at the thought of her husband becoming a father to their unborn child. But instead, everything continued to be a lie.

In fact, El knew deep down that if she were to have a baby, it wouldn't be his. The thought alone scared El to her wits end about her real everything seemed to become. The cheating, then the heartbreak and now it was becoming known for El's life to get seemingly worse by the second.

If there is a God out there somewhere, now would be a good time to send her any time of miracle. One that would consist of two arms, two legs and a heartbeat because she knew she wouldn't be able to hide this lie for 9 months solid.

If Mike hadn't been looming over her short frame, she would've reached over and strangled his neck for putting her in this position in the first place.

*Stupid, stupid boy.*

Before El could muster up the courage to reply, Will puts a finger to

his lips. "Everyone be quiet, I want to feel the baby kick." He squeaks out excitedly, his face now pressed up against El's un-bumped belly and panic seems to arise within her mind.

"First off, I'm pretty sure you wouldn't need your ears to feel the baby move and second, I'm only a few weeks along so in reality the baby would be the size of a pea."

Will continued to look at El's stomach in amazement, his crooked smile almost beginning to latch itself onto El's face.

She loved when her brother was happy, especially if she was the reason behind it. But what could she do now? Everything they were telling him had been utter lies, even Joyce remained baffled, continuing to lean against the front door.

"Take it easy, I'm sure El doesn't want her stomach probed. Not to mention, you'll have the whole nine months to feel a kick, I'm sure of it." Mike leans over and sighs against her tight curls, if it wasn't for El's love for her brother and their relationship, she would of pried him off her right then and there.

"You're right, I'm sorry. I'm just so happy for you guys, I was wondering when this was going to happen." He says gently, Joyce makes her way to where he sat before pulling him swiftly off the ground and towards the inside of their home.

Fuck, El could feel her scalp beginning to prickle as it was almost only herself and Mike left outside together. El faintly heard Will usher out, "I'm finally going to be an uncle, this has got to be the best Christmas dinner we've ever had."

El puts her hands on her hips as she notices Will's out of her view before fully turning to face Mike.

If looks could kill, Mike would be buried six feet under.

*"You've got some serious explaining to do."*

XXXXXXXXXX

**AND THATS IT.**

Hope my lovelies enjoyed this chapter! Thoughts would be great? Do you guys like the way the story is heading so far? Please let me know what you guys actually think, I love reading each and every comment off you wonderful people!

Hope your week has been amazing ((I'm going to start updating a little more, just don't give up on the story! I've been writing these last few chapters on my phone because the wifi has been out so I've been using my credit.

Can I have 10 comments for the next story?

L xx

## 9. Chapter 9

Once more, El lied to herself that she hated him to the very core. Hate couldn't even begin to describe the way her blood was effortlessly pounding and her head was thumping at an alarming rate.

El stared at him in disbelief, something deep within her chest cracking. "Why did you do that?"

El wanted to shrink back from his stare, it was so unbelievably tense and raw as she watched something swirl within his eyes, she felt her entire body shutter as their gaze broke apart. Suddenly his demeanour shifted, a lopsided grin was reserved on his face as he suddenly leaned back against the front door. "I didn't see you object earlier. Besides, it was the only thing I could think of. I panicked, okay? I'm sorry."

El threw her hands up in frustration. "No! You can't just expect me to let this go, Mike. You shouldn't have even been here in the first place! If it wasn't for you, none of this would have happened." She snapped, rubbing her temples in circular motions.

"Are you suggesting that this is all my fault?" Mike sighed. His whole body sagging against the door as he rubbed his hands against his tired face.

El's eyes widened and her head up so fast, she was surprised it didn't fall off her neck entirely. "Ding, ding, ding! We have a winner, who knew that the insufferable Mike Wheeler would know when he fucked up." She ushers out, coldly.

She could hardly breathe.

Not when her heart was beating to death.

"Don't act so innocent, sweetheart. You could've denied everything, but you still decided to go along with it. It's not just me whose screwed, we both are." Mike's smile got even wider as he watched El become even more flustered by him.

The tops of her ears were turning red and by the looks of it, Mike's presence had seemingly made the rest of her body match the angry shade.

He was enjoying this.

"You son of a b-" She stopped herself, the flush in her cheeks getting darker and she desperately needed to calm down if she didn't want him thinking he still had an affect on her.

Mike let out an amused chuckle as he continued to watch her from the doorframe. It took every ounce of her being not to reach over and pry that smug grin right off of his stupid, stupid, face.

"You know what? Fine. Since it was your brilliant idea in the first place, you can be the one to break the news to him." El added smugly, watching as his eyes widened like sorcerers.

"Oh common, he'll give me the puppy eyes!" Mike complained, a whiny edge to his voice. "You know I won't be able to resist giving in." His face scrunched up in annoyance, it almost made him look somewhat cute for a second, that was until El realised that she wouldn't be stuck in this mess if it wasn't for him.

Not to mention; he's a lying, cheating, sack of shit.

Goddamn idiot, is what he is.

"Exactly. Since your such a good liar, I'm sure telling the truth for once might actually be your undoing." She exclaimed, her eyes drifting to where his face fell at her statement. He looked defeated, worn down, but it's what his big doe eyes held that made El feel almost sorry for him in a way;

Mike Wheeler was still hopelessly in love with his soon to be ex wife.

With a small sigh, she gently sprawled a hand against his clothed shoulder. It was a simple attempt at a truce, that El knew, but for now it was the best he was going to get from her. Not after all he did, there was still so much hidden anger radiating off El. But for now it didn't seem merely as important compared to El's false pregnancy.

How did she marry this man in the first place?

Because you loved him in every possibly way, that's why.

She glared at her subconscious, if that was even remotely possible before dropping her hand in defeat. "The sooner we fix this, the easier are lives will be." El murmured, rubbing her wedding ring against the bridge of her finger.

"You forgot to add painless." He sneered, his teeth bared at her but El knew better. He was hurting, maybe even more than she was. So she let his remark slide, only just this once though.

Crossing her arms over her chest, she took a few steps towards his towering shadow before she swiftly began poking him in the chest as each word breathily escaped her lips, "You started this, now it's your turn to finish it."

Within a few seconds, Mike caught El's hand and laced his fingers with her small ones. They were undeniably fragile compared to his. Sometimes, he forgot how tiny she was compared to his big build, the thought alone made a sad smile ooze it's way onto his flushed pink lips. Yes, El may be small in size but it's her fiery personality that makes up for it in so many ways.

And my god, how much he missed his girl, his El.

He knew he created an even bigger mess by lying to Will, but a huge part of Mike wished that this facade had been somewhat real. He still loved her, that he knew without a doubt in his mind but he fucked up greatly.

He continued to push away the one girl who taught him how to love, to finally feel content within himself, all for some girl that he barely even knew. He remembers Emily relentlessly moaning underneath him, her voice becoming stuck in her throat as her hips met his for every hard thrust. All he imagined was his wife though. El's petite mouth forming a small o as she cried out while pulling his knotted locks, restraining him from moving out of her.

What El didn't know was, was that everytime he fucked Emily raw

and primal, it was always El he pictured in his mind, not her.

He was royally fucked.

Mike could sense that the fight had seemed to leave El's voice altogether, and what petrified him the most was the fact that he wasn't ready to give up on her. Yet watching El, it finally dawned on him that she was already beginning to slip away from his fingertips.

Why couldn't she see what she was doing? He loved his girl, he wanted her to fall in love with him all over again if she just wouldn't be so stubborn.

But instead it had to come to this; excessive lies and now an unwanted fake pregnancy with a woman who could barely look him in the eyes without venom filling them to the brim.

He cleared his throat achingly as she quickly detached his hold from her, El's warm eyes becoming cautious by the second. Mike tried mustering up all his lost courage that seemed to fall in the pit of his stomach.

"I'll fix this El, I'll make sure of it."

What he really wished to say was;

I'll fix us.

#### **AUTHORS NOTE:**

*I updated! Hope you guys enjoyed it, I'll try updating soon. I'm moving into a new place so I'm a bit busy at the moment but oh well.*

*Hope my writing didn't suck too bad.*

*Can you guys please check my new upcoming story that I just put up today called "The Story of Us" I'd love to see what you lovelies think of my idea*

*L xx*

## 10. Chapter 10

El had never before minded being alone with Mike and her family. Now she dreaded it.

Part of El wanted to try again, to endure all the heartache and suffering to be with him. But she couldn't do that to herself or to her heart. She knew it would be an endless cycle of destruction and tears. She was desperate to know, was it possible for her heart to still grieve after thousands of wretched sobs have poured out of her mouth? The cries always wringed heavily in her ears - they were loud - glass shattering, gut wrenching that to El every tear was sending her into a spiral of emptiness.

Complete nothingness.

She was scared, utterly terrified, that she knew. What she didn't know was how much more pain she could inflict on herself by being near Mike. Hell, his presence alone was enough to slice her heart into two. But to watch him with her family, everything seemed like how it once was before.

Before Emily, before the betrayal had begun, when they were happy and *oh so in love with each other*.

She still loved him, it was suffocating her and she could feel herself resenting him for it.

El's eyes scanned over him, she wanted to cry within that moment. She knows the burning tears will come in floating waves, like it always does and she was over it. The tears had to stop, the heartache had to come to an end because she wasn't so sure how much her body could handle.

After all her heart felt like it had collided against glass as it teared and pulled at her heartstrings, leaving her empty and broken.

As broken as she once was before Mike seemingly entered her life, and how ironically, the one person she gave her heart and soul to completely had let her mind whither it's way into a black hole. One

that she didn't know she'd be able to escape from on her own and it was all his fault, hatred began filling her heart and brimming it's way onto the surface that El's knuckles were achingly turning white as she clenched them into fists tightly.

She ran her tongue along the insides of her teeth as she bit back a hiss that threatened to escape her mouth. Her nails where wedging down into her porcelain skin, threatening to break the surface if she chose to dug any harder.

It was Will's comforting voice that pulled El back into reality, "I didn't realise how much I missed you until these last few months began to fly by so quickly, is everything alright? You know you could always talk to me, even if I may be a thousand miles away. I'm still your brother. You're still my best friend." He than placed a soft, warm hand onto hers and let out a small smile. She knew he was only trying to help and she loved him for it but it was his eyes that gave it away.

Pity swirled in them heavily, almost as if he knew Mike had been spluttering bullshit moments before to him. His pale-blue eyes bored into hers, and for a second she was ready to combust. To spill out every single detail that he had missed out on knowing, how crushed and lonely she had felt since he left home and when Mike decided to have an affair, but most importantly how this pregnancy was only a scam but a small part of her wishes it had been true in a way and she hates herself for being so weak.

El tried not to breathe too deeply, because the room smelled of sugar cookies and Mike's scent and it was almost too much for her to bare. Her heart turned over heavily, almost painfully as Will waited for a response patiently but her mouth went slack. She pulled through though, she wasn't going to let Mike speak for her again.

Not now, not *ever*.

"Nothing to worry about," she said, her voice low, her gaze floating off and focusing on her empty plate in front of her. She couldn't look at him, she wasn't good at lying and Will knew that with every fibre of his being. So her gaze remained on her plate, "Work's just been getting to me lately, I'm not getting much sleep from it so I'm just a

bit tired all the time."

When El finally managed to look at him, her heart raced and thumped heavily as Will's lips pulled into a frown before the topic blew over by Joyce's ramblings.

"And you Mike? How's the job going?" Everyone watched in shock as Mike began rubbing El's belly in slow, steady circles. The corners of his mouth turned upright as his other hand ran steadily through his mass of unkept curls. He was nervous - that El knew - he only tugged and pulled at his hair when he was lost for words.

In reality, Mike had lost his job months back due to financial issues so they let him go. This was before ciaos filled El's everyday life, and yet, she couldn't help but feel a small part of her was responsible for that. The fight's had been bad, they fought endlessly which resulted in Mike leaving the apartment for hours. But he never dared to touch her, he wouldn't, Mike wasn't like that. Back then, he was still her sweet boy. His lips would never frown around her, his words would lift her spirit and indulge her heart and soul.

But now? El was speechless.

This time she answered for him as he had done for her. El reminisced on the sweet memories and innocent gestures they shared. She didn't want to hate him, hate wasn't a word that came close to Mike Wheeler until now.

Even though she may not be his wife for much longer, she felt protective over him, and for the first time in a long while - El pushed back the hatred and held onto the love that still lingered. "Well," El said, swallowing the lump that was forming in the back of her throat. She continued on, "Mike offered to leave work to help me with the pregnancy. I didn't realise he had already been saving for this moment and I didn't want him to leave a job he's been working so hard for. But every child needs it's father, and with the money Mike saved, I realised I didn't want him anywhere but my side."

Mike let out a shuddering breath as he leaned over ever so gently and placed a kiss against El's forehead. It lingered for a moment too soon but El fell into his touch anyway. She knew what it implied - it was a

thank you - a small gesture.

Joyce nodded mutely before Will muttered, "Where's Dad?" Over the years, Hopper had gained a strong attachment to the boys and El. They realised he deserved a proper title, after all, he was apart of the family. El's brain wondered off to where Jonathon and Nancy were, they finally had there baby girl Eureka, a little bundle of joy with expressive eyes and a smile that melted the coldest of hearts.

El loved her with every fibre of her being, hell, she was the reason why El wanted a child. She didn't mind whether or not it was a boy or a girl - all she knew was she wanted it to be Mike's.

Yet now? She wasn't so sure about anything anymore.

All except that she needed to leave and she was ready to take Mike along with her. El wasn't through with him, she desperately needed answers to stop the raging questions invading her thoughts as she slept at night.

Before Joyce could reply, El hastily pushed her chair back and quickly stood up; She drew in a long breath and grasped Mike's arm as she gently tugged him upright and off of his chair. Without even a second thought El put his hand back against her shaking belly and she swallowed down her nerves.

His black, stunned eyes met hers and she didn't know that it was still possible for her heart to break all over again as she watched him intently as tears were threatening to fall from his eyes. He was strong though - they both knew he was the anchor between the two of them - but for the first time she was the strongest.

She averted her eyes from everyone's penetrating gaze and Joyce's scowl as she began mumbling, "I think I need to head outside for some fresh air, the baby's already making me feel nauseous. Mike will you take me please?"

The sight of him was killing her. She loved him, needed him like she needed air to breathe but she knew that there time was over. She need all her questions finally answered and than with her head held high - she would let him go. She tried to shake away the

unwelcoming images and memories from her mind that had been clawing at her violently but they wouldn't flee.

El was tired. So tired.

Without anymore words being spoken, they left the room soundlessly as they made their way onto the patio. The only thing that could be heard was the pitter patter of their rushed steps before Mike grazed his fingers against the shell of her palm and forced her to halt her steps once they were nowhere to be seen.

He pulled her into his side and she let him just this once, already loving the soft feel of him against her. She continued to hug him on her side that her head now rested neatly just below his chin.

It was their unspoken goodbye.

El waited for him to say something, but he was quiet as she felt him breath her in and began hugging her tighter against his clothed side - almost as if he was afraid to let her go - to watch her disappear from him forever.

El wedged herself onto her tippy toes as she pulled his head towards hers, this is when she felt his warm tears against the swell of her neck. He was crying, and she knew within that moment that she had been Mike Wheeler's undoing. That she had broken him as he had broken her and that alone terrified her.

Mike's body shook as his cries didn't seem to slow down, he began choking back on his tears as his shoulders shook with such force that El was lost for words. Mike than slid his arms around her waist and continued to clung to her for a long time. She stood there in his arms, not saying a word, just listening to his cries.

After a few minutes, he whispered. "I will always love you. Never doubt that." She pulled back and swiped his tears with the pad of her thumb. Entwining her hands in his hair, she returned the favour and kissed him. The kiss was earth shattering, it gripped and pulled at her heart as she knew she'd be able to move on.

But he'd keep a small piece of her always.

"As will I - but for us to have a proper chance at a fresh start - we need to talk."

**AUTHORS NOTE:**

**I'm sorry for not updating for awhile, life has been hectic and chaotic as of recently and to be honest with you guys I did lose a lot of inspiration for this story! I'll try and update whenever I can, Let me know what you think darlings! Missed you all.**

**L xx**

## 11. Chapter 11

### (SONG FOR THIS CHAPTER - VIENNA BY BILLY JOEL)

Mike buried his face into El's clothed shoulder and let out a sigh of contentment. His touch baffled her, the way it endlessly made her heart skitter around her chest. "Mike," El said, choking on his name, "Please."

His gaze dropped to her now, his arms still locked around El's waist. Tears continuously dripped off of his chin. He lets out a slow, shaky breath but that didn't stop the ache forming in El's chest.

"Let's get out of here—" El begins, the words tight in her throat. He tightened his hold around her, almost as a silent no, but she knew that they couldn't stand this way forever. Joyce and Will would soon come looking for them, the pair had been a blubbering mess and I'm sure the sight of them would be questionable to her Family.

Especially to Hopper.

"I'll go anywhere as long as I'm with you." Mike rasped out, his voice hoarse and broken from the unleashed tears. His eyes blazed as El reached over and held out her hand to him.

Mike accepted it, he'd always accept her touch. Would always accept his El.

He looked down at their entwined hands - he ignored the way his nerves were tingling and ready to combust at any given moment. And together - they abandoned the patio and walked towards the empty streets of Hawkins.

Mike was shaking, shaking hard, it frightened El to watch him crumble to pieces in front of her. But she knew they needed this - now more than ever. "Well . . .," she says with a broken laugh, "Where do we start?"

He kept his eyes on the pavement, whispering softly, "We don't have to do this, El. I don't want to hurt you. I've already done that enough

don't you think?" His hand drifted up, dragging back through his hair whilst the other hand was firmly planted in El's.

He wasn't ready to pull apart from her just yet.

She let out a shuddering breath, her eyes rose to meet his. "No." She shakes her head firmly, "I need to know."

He let out a low, flat laugh. "Of course you do. You've always been strong. I envied you for it - that's not what I'm worried about." Mike lurched forward, a small, whimpering noise came out of him - a desperate sob.

She watched him fall apart, they wouldn't be able to get through this if she didn't stop this madness. "What are you so scared about?" she said, her voice quavering.

And then they jerked to a frantic stop. Mike was blocking the rest of the side walk as his body lurched in front of hers. A feeling of complete and utter helplessness was suffocating El as she watched him trying to compose himself. He had trouble breathing, his chest tightened so much as his heart faltered at the sight of El staring right back at him.

Her make up was smudged, her hair sprung out in wild masses of urban curls that scattered across the nape of her neck, wispy pieces of her hair clung to her dampened cheeks - and yet - she was still effortlessly beautiful to him.

It scared him to death - how could he possibly move on when there would never be another girl like El. His first love, his only love.

"I'm not okay," Mike said hoarsely between breaths. "I've never been okay. But you made it better, you made my life tolerable and worth living because you were always there. You were there through every bad nightmare, through every faulty moment in my life because you never managed to leave my side. And now? Life won't mean a god damn thing because you won't be in it anymore. That's what I'm scared of, I'm scared of waking up realising you won't be there laying next to me every morning and it breaks my fucking heart."

El stood stone still and stared up at him even as tears ran down her cheeks. Then she laughed. A sound so raw that it made him flinch as it invaded his ears heavily. She continued laughing as the tears poured over her cheeks, spilling into her neck and onto her already dampened collar of her dress.

"I hate you." She shoved him hard, ignoring the burning ache in her hands as she continued to shove him over and over. She screeched at the tops of her lungs, "I hate you! I hate you!"

He took another step back from her, his hand going to his hair but he never dared to touch her once. El shoved at his chest with all of her might, she wanted to hurt him, to let him feel and see what he had done to her. Her breath hitched as she fought for air, her arms weighing heavy but that didn't stop her from muttering one last time how much she hated him, despised him even.

They wouldn't be in this mess if he hadn't fucked Emily.

Mike winced at the dullness in her eyes as her arms finally fell to her sides ever so slowly.

"You hate me," he repeated, his face void of all emotion. "You hate me?"

"I can't," she whispered at last. "I wish I could, but I can't. I could never hate you."

El's entire body started to tremble as her voice was starting to crack under the weight of her tears spilling over and never seeming to end. And it was all his fault.

Mike tried to touch her but she backs away. It made him sick.

He continues to move closer towards her, El presses her hands against his chest and begins hitting him all over again but this time he catches both of her flying fists in one of his. He broke down, "Come back to me, sweetheart. Please, come back."

Mike latches tighter to her. "I don't want you to go, I'll never be ready for you to go." He whispered hoarsely into her hair. El eases him off of her gently, she touch's his face, her palm moving over the small

stubbles beginning to form on his jaw. She watches him silently, almost tiredly, and lets out a small sigh.

"You slept with someone else. For all I know it could've happened more than once on the nights you'd disappear and didn't come back home for hours. Even if I wanted to believe you, how could I?" She watched his face shift, clearly in pain. She sucked in a breath, knowing that this wasn't doing them any good.

Maybe it had been to early for the both of them, maybe she wasn't ready for the answers he was willing to give her.

Mike fell silent. He had to force the words past his throat. *"If I could have done it all over again, I would have loved you better. But I could not have loved you more."*

#### **AUTHORS NOTE:**

**TWO CHAPTERS IN ONE NIGHT!** I must say, I am pretty impressed but I'd be even more happy to get your honest opinion about the story...don't worry everything will start to fall into place for the pair. But for now, enjoy some angst.

**Lots of love,**

**L xx**

## 12. Chapter 12

El ignored the pang of sadness that jabbed at her relentlessly as came closer towards Nancy's house.

She pushed the trembling feelings away as she made her way to their front door. Before El's hand came close to contact with the front door - Nancy appears, wearing an apron covered in large amounts of flour whilst bouncing Eureka on her hip, and El finally let the air out that she had been holding in. She missed her, and the smile gracing Nancy's flour-covered face, she knew she missed El just as much.

El wrinkled her nose to cover her laugh, Nancy was a complete mess but it was good to see her. The next thing she knew, her feet were hanging off the ground and Jonathon's arms swopped her in a bear hug.

El let her cheek fall to her brothers shoulder and hugged him back. As he settled her back on her two left feet, she noticed he had a lopsided, open smile and that's when she realised she was glad she took up Nancy's offer to visit.

"We missed you, El. You need to visit us more often, once every few months isn't enough." he scolded, but his voice held playfulness.

El gave Jonathon a sideways smile before watching Nancy placing the giggling baby into his awaiting arms, which he gladly accepted. His face sparkled in delight as he pulled faces at his daughter, Eureka continued to giggle as drool formed on the corners of her toothless grin.

Nancy turned El around by her shoulders, gave her a little push towards their living room, and kissed her cheek before whispering in the shell of her ear, "He's right you know. It feels like we never get to see you anymore. I'm glad you came today, I really am."

El's face flushed with embarrassment and she quickly reached over and gave Nancy's hand a gentle squeeze. She knew everything would be okay, Nancy had been in her life for years and she trusted her completely. El was more embarrassed that she isolated herself so

much because of Mike, she realised that she couldn't hide anymore.

"Dad?" El whispered, her footsteps stopping at a halt. There Hopper was, uncrossing his large arms and leaning himself away from the lounge room door frame; coming towards her in three quick strides.

"Hey, poo-bear." He grinned at her, opening his arms wide in an inviting gesture that El's heart seemed to crack despite her best attempts to stop it.

God, she missed him as well.

Without a second thought, she fell into his embrace and smelled his strong cologne. She didn't care that his long beard scratched the service of her skin, nor did she mind his police badge pocking brutally at her chest, she was just happy that he was here.

Nancy stopped where she was beside El and eyed them both playfully.

His smile deepens, revealing his hidden dimples on the sides of his cheeks. "I see someone's missed me?"

El nods her head eagerly into his chest, mumbling, "You have no idea."

Nancy begins clapping her hands together enthusiastically, "Okay, as much as this reunion was needed and I loved watching every second of it, we still have a lot to discuss." Her dainty hands grips both El's and Hoppers as she slides them down and onto their generously large couch beside Jonathon and Eureka.

"Hot coco anyone?" Nancy asks, a small smile tugging at the corners of her lips as she eyed everyone in the room. Jonathon raised little Eureka's pudgy arm as a yes, Hopper nodded his head in approval and finally all eyes landed on El.

"With extra marshmallows, please." El says, looking up and watching Nancy smile at her answer.

Nancy sighed dramatically as she rested a hand against her chest, a playful twinkle glittering in the corners of her warm eyes. "How

could I forget?"

As El watched Nancy dart away towards the kitchen, she took notice of the loungeroom they were all sitting in. It was covered head-to-toe in pictures; her eye's lingered on one particular photograph though.

It was of the gang.

They had all been around thirteen in the photograph it seems, except Nancy who had just turned eighteen a few weeks before. They were perched up against an oak tree outside of Mrs Wheelers old home, Nancy and El leaning forward whilst the boys had stood tall and broad right behind them.

That's not what caught El's eye though, it was the youthfulness that flowed on the boys faces and of the girls.

They seemed happy, care-free almost, especially younger El.

El's eyes widened in shock and her breathing hitched as her brown eyes drew closer to the photo. Everyone in it held a contagious, toothy grins, all except Mike.

His jet black eye's were planted firmly on younger El's face. No frown's were edged on his boyish features though, just a small smile, but it was his eyes that glistened with endless amounts of love as he stared at El whilst she stared straight at the camera.

Nancy must've not noticed it though when she hung the picture in her home and El wishes she hadn't noticed either.

El didn't dare to make a fuss - *no, not this time* - instead she focused her full attention onto Nancy as she carefully handed her the hot coco off the try and El gave her a small, reassuring smile in return as a silent thank you.

El sipped the drink contently, she sighed into the warm cup as the hot coco calmed down her aching nerves and washed over a sense of security. She had nothing to be nervous about, this was her family, long before Mike became her husband or her secret lover.

El noticed Hopper smiling sadly on the couch beside her, rummaging

a hand through his greyish-balding hair, placing the chocolatey goodness that nestled its way into the small mug on his perched side table.

El was thankful for the drink, it reminded her of her childhood and for that she was grateful, not to mention Nancy made one hell of a hot chocolate in the weirdest of circumstances when needed.

It was one of her specialties.

El continued sipping the remaining contents greedily before sculling what was left and began placing it next to Hopper's.

El stares down Jonathon as he takes another sip from his mug, whilst holding Eureka in his lap and looks at her like she's in for a surprise.

Her eyes are pleading at him, she doesn't know what for though, all she knows is that if the topic involves her *stupid, stupid* husband than she'll be ready to high tail it out of there quicker than they could say the letter M.

"You know Poo-bear, we're your family. It's our job to be there for you when your going through something as traumatic as your divorce. You don't need to hide from any of us, do you understand what I'm saying?" Hopper fully turned to face her now, weariness edged its way onto his features.

He seemed calm and collected but El knew he was just as scared as she was.

He was scared that she'd crawl back into her dark place, one that consisted of isolation but most importantly, no Mike. El knew it wasn't healthy to live in fear of the unknown, to constantly dread waking up the next morning to only begin counting down the hours until she could sleep herself away again.

As El looked at Hooper, *really looked at him*, she noticed how beaten down and old he'd become as she grew up. Like life had battered his soul ferociously and she couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness that one day he wouldn't be around to give her his advice anymore.

And because of that recognition, the tears swirled in her eyes but she

blinked them away. She was sick of appearing weak, everyone already walked around her as though broken sea shells lingered with every step she took and she was over it.

Without a second thought, she swung her pale arms around Hoppers neck loosely and pressed a feather-like kiss against his stubbly cheek. He relaxed in her embrace, the room became quiet but peaceful and her heart fluttered at that.

For once it wasn't because of the dull ache Mike had left on her, it was because her daddy had her in his arms.

And it was what she had needed for so long.

El and Hopper didn't even hear the pitter patter of rushed footsteps as more hands and bodies were now freshly pressed up against one another's. El could feel baby Eureka's drool land on the back of her neck, her chubby fingers twisting the ends of her short curls and giving a slight tug at the ends.

Yet, El didn't care at all.

In fact she loved every second of the hug, with everyone's tangled limbs and warm embraces and occasional giggles erupting from her god daughters mouth. Hopper was the first one to pull apart and than the rest of the scene unfolded in front of her.

No other words about Mike were exchanged and for that El was grateful.

The hug had been enough, filled with so much love and meaning and she knew that she could get through this. Even if it may be slow, they'd always reassure her that they'd be behind her with every step she proceeded to take.

"Okay, enough gushy moments. Let me see that beautiful baby." El says, wiping a small tear that leaked out from the corner of her smudged eye. Everyone around her smiled at El's choice of words and watched El as her arms reached out for Jonathon to pass over his baby girl.

With sudden caution, El pried Eureka out of her brother's strong hold.

She took her in - and admired the way her frizzy dark blonde curls fell against her head and how bright her baby blue eye's were.

Her heart thawed in that moment, El's fingers lightly brushed through her matted curls whilst the other held the back of her Eureka's head in a careful grip.

"Why hello there." El sighed into her frizzy hair, foolishly grinning at the baby smell indulging her senses. She was the most beautiful baby El had ever encountered, what shocked El the most was how comfortable Eureka seemed holding her.

Nancy informed El that her daughter was majorly fussy with people that weren't Nancy or Jonathon. Even with Hopper and Joyce, she was overly eager to be back in her Mother's arms.

Jonathon looked over at El in sheer shock, a wolfish smile hanging on his lips and his eye's danced with delight as he watched his baby sister and baby girl share a moment.

"Look's like we've found our babysitter for the next 18 years. If your up for it, sis." Jonathon asked cheekily, moving over to where El held Eureka and graciously planted his knee's firmly in front of them.

He couldn't bear to be apart from his daughter for too long, he knew he was being extra clingy and often a little bit silly, but how couldn't he be?

Not when she managed to brighten every dull moment in his and Nancy's chaotic life.

And he loved it.

"Only if you'll have me." El replied back with as much enthusiasm as she could muster, never taking her eye's off of her god daughter.

Now was probably the right time for the others to get a quick hold before putting Eureka to down for her usual nap routine but El didn't want to let her go just yet and Eureka seemed the same, not even noticing her daddy's lingering presence right next to her.

El could do this, she was so sure of it. She could be the god mother

Eureka well deserved instead of shutting herself off. El could once become the girl nestled in the picture, maybe not as young, but she could become that vibrant again.

That happy again.

*She knew it.*

**AUTHORS NOTE:**

Three chapters in pretty much a day and a half! I hope you liked this fluffy moment shared - it was much needed I know - I'm slowly getting into the story again and who knows maybe a certain someone by the name of Ben will emerge his way back into the story once again?

I just wanted to give a warm and welcoming shout out for the people that have stuck by or who are new to this story. Thank you so much! I appreciate every second you take of reading and reviewing, makes me so happy.

I'll update as soon as I can! Much love my darlings,

L xx

## 13. Chapter 13

*You may not be her first, her last, or her only. She loved before she may love again. But if she loves you now, what else matters?*

- Bob Marley

"You've got to be kidding, they even have a lady bug outfit! Do you think they'd have it in Eureka's size?" Nancy squeals, propping herself up onto her tippy toes to get a better look at the selection. Her squeals soon come to an end as her hands drop to her side.

A look of disappointment flashes across her features before her gaze lands on another clothes rack. Her hands began to clap together wildly, her eyes lighting up with excitement once again, "Never mind, that monkey outfit over there would look even cuter on her." She sighs dramatically before rushing over towards the other outfit choices.

She examines the sizes before pulling one out suddenly and draping it across Eureka's little body. El smiles at that as Eureka begins squealing like her Mommy, her chubby hands reaching for the monkey outfit.

Nancy quickly looks at El and breaks out into a fit of giggles before prying Eureka out of El's tired arms. Don't get her wrong, El loves holding her god daughter but she was a chubby little thing, *well, that's what made her so damn cute.*

"Look's like she prefers this choice instead." El laughs, tickling the bridge of the baby's nose, earning an appreciative drool escaping the corners of Eureka's mouth.

Nancy nods her head in agreement before making their way towards the cashier. Before Nancy could reach for her purse, El quickly scurries over and hands the cashier girl a twenty dollar bill. "Wait, I can pay-" El cuts her off.

"Don't be silly, she's my god daughter. Let me spoil her." El ushers out. Nancy doesn't object this time instead plants a big wet kiss against El's cheek that it was El's turn to let out a short squeal. Her

cheek felt rather cold and slimy, she playfully rolled her eye's at Nancy letting out a small huff in return.

With Eureka on Nancy's hip and El with the remaining bags, they hurried there way out of the baby store.

The weather was cloudy, a possible chance of rain the radio announced in the car on the way to the mall. El would've preferred to of been in bed with Mike, her head tucked against his neck as there bodies were draped against one another's.

El shook the thought's away though, she had been getting better day by day but it was still hard. If it wasn't for Nancy distracting her lately and little Eureka's cuteness overload she would probably be sleeping the day's away.

The mall was overly crowded today. Strangers shoulders were relentlessly brushing against each other's, rushed footsteps were heard heavily and the sounds of children's excited pleads made there way towards El's ears.

El loved it though - it was the distraction she needed - she felt almost *normal*.

El's eye's lit up with sudden recognition as she gazed over the familiar coffee shop she once loved and adored effortlessly. It was cramped between a toy store and a dainty flower shop run by an elderly man called Joe.

How could El have forgotten, that's where Mike had collected El's corsage when they had been in middle school and soon after where all of their wedding arrangement's had been made.

"Bella ragazza!" The elderly man spotted her, his hands waving above his head to get her full attention. El turned her head towards Nancy helplessly, her body frozen and stone-still.

Nancy let out a small sigh but her eye's were soft and encouraging. She placed a warm hand against El's clothed shoulder, giving her a small shove towards the store. "You should go say hi. It's the right thing to do El, I'll put Eureka and the rest of the bags in the car and

I'll meet you there?" She raises an eyebrow at El, almost *daring* her to argue back but she knew better not to.

El pursed her lips into a frown but made sure Nancy only saw. She liked Joe - in fact she remembered a time where Hopper would pester El to leave the shop and instead go play outside with the rest of the group. Yet, on day's where she was getting a little bit tired of the boys and wanted to do her own thing she'd go there. Listening to Jo's endless rambling's about his sick wife and her utter love for all things that grew from the ground.

In town, Joe Moretti was known to be one of the crazies. Ever since his wife Coraline's passing, his life had been dedicated to running the store. He filled the empty spaces with *roses*, *tulips*, *lillies* - name *any* type of flower - and it would miraculously be there somehow.

"Vieni qui angelo." The older man shouted once more. El watched as Nancy and Eureka made their way to the car park, their swirling shadows disappearing from sight.

El's heart tumbled and pulled as she stood alone, her nervousness crawling it's way to the surface. El than tucked away a loose curl behind her ear before holding her head high and crossing over towards where the man stood.

El's eye's lurched forward at the alluring sign ahead of her, the letters reading **Happy Petals**. She smiled at that as a sudden warmth filled her thought's and calmed her whopping nerves.

El didn't need to be nervous for godsake, she *knew* this man, she was *familiar* with the shop, what she *needed* to do was stop.

The bell jingled lightly above her as she opened the door, the smell of fresh lillies clouded her vision but so did the older man rushing towards her. "Bella ragazza! Oh how I've missed you." His voice was croaky and rough - age seeping through.

His hands were comforting and welcoming as he pulled her into a swift hug, pecking both of her cheeks as he pulled away.

His hair reminded her of pepper. Little bit's of grey were making it's

way through the remaining coloured hairs that had been left. The corner's of his bottomless eyes held the smallest of wrinkles in it's corners as his smile grew heavily, a goofy-like expression gracing his face.

His smile was contagious and El couldn't contain her's either. "I know it's been so long. I'm sorry I haven't visited you sooner." El bit her lip and played with the edges of her sleeve, seamless pieces beginning to fall off as she pulled at them one by one.

Joe scoffed at that, wrapping an arm around her shoulder. "Don't be silly, you have a husband now! Your family is a priority, but it would be nice to see your beautiful face more often." He chuckled, sending a wink in return.

For how old he was, Mr Moretti was still in fact a charmer. Coraline had been a lucky girl when she was alive or what he used to say "Luckiness doesn't begin to describe how thankful I am that my wife put up with the town crazy for so long".

With Joe's arm still draped across El's he swiftly pulled her into a seat next to the counter as he plopped himself into the seat right beside of her's. Time passed as they talked for what seemed like hours - El poured her heart out to him. She told every detail, every emotion and every gruesome heartbreak that has happened within the last six months.

He sat in silence through it all. He watched her, her features changing miraculously as she told each memory with great detail. El was like a daughter to him and as he watched all the pain arise and fall all around them, he couldn't help but pull her hand into his and press a feather-like kiss against her knuckles.

When El had finally calmed down, with not a single tear in sight, Joe reached over and pulled out a red rose from the many piles that surrounded the store. Her breathing quickened as she watched him with a curious expression, with a quick rip to the long stem, he brushed away her locks and placed it against the shell of her ear.

As he pulled away, El asked him why he did that, "A beautiful flower for a beautiful girl my dear." His croaky response was, he continued

on. "Mike may be a fool but that doesn't mean there won't be a man who wouldn't treat you the way you deserve to be treated. Let your heart breathe, let it grieve and heal because I can assure you there are so many others out there that would love to pick up the pieces if you won't do it for yourself."

El stared back numbly, almost alarmingly at his response. They sat in silence, her youthful hand still resting in his callous-filled one.

She watched as his brown eye's glistened with unleashed tears as he looked at the store and sighed a sigh so sad that El's heart broke right then and there for him.

"When my wife died, I lost all hope. We built this store together, how could I possibly move on without feeling her all around me somehow?" Joe breathes out, their hands drifting apart as it rests against his clothed heart.

He continues on, "We vowed to each other through sickness and in health and that's what I did for the rest of her remaining days. I watched as the cancer spread, eating away at her lungs and I cried every time she wasn't looking. I had to be strong for the both of us. Once she passed, I thought I had no reason to live. Oh how wrong I was dear girl. . you see, love never leaves us. If it was real, it will linger until our souls leave our body. My love, what that boy did to you was awful and he will never fully recover from such a grave loss. But you will, our hearts hold another spot for a second love." He smiles at that last part before calling out;

"Amore mio, luce mia, il mio cuore viene qui." As El watches, a puzzled expression forming on her lips. Within a few seconds, a woman makes her way from the back room.

An apron covering her front and a smile forming across her freckled face. She appears in her late fifties - sandy blonde hair pulled back into a French braid and blue eye's that looked *oh so familiar* that El couldn't understand why.

El continues to watch in fascination as the woman rushes to Joe's side. He pampers her face with tiny kisses, earning a collective spree of giggles from her. She plants herself on his knee as he hold's her

close to him - almost as if he was scared to let her go.

*Like she was his anchor, just like Mike once was for El.*

"Lillie took pity on me and made sure the store didn't go down in ruins. She helped me, she healed what I thought was broken. I wasn't easy to deal with at times, there were moments I felt guilty for falling in love with Lillie that I pushed her away. I would push and push because I felt ashamed, after all, I loved Coraline with all my being... I was certain that there wouldn't be enough space for her to fill. I was wrong, everyone deserves a second chance at love. That doesn't mean I've forgotten about Coraline though, she will always hold a piece of my heart. But here's the thing sweet girl, the love I had for my wife was real and endless and I will never forget the moments we shared, but you can't fight fate."

Lillie pushes herself closer to him and he kisses her neck finally murmuring, "Love is love. It doesn't have to be forgotten, celebrate what was once a beautiful relationship and let your heart find someone else to cherish instead. Let it be free from him."

El was surprised to find her cheeks appearing dry, her heart thawed at Joe's words but her mind echoed and replayed the last few;

***Let it be free of him.***

"Mom, where should I put these boxes?" A husky voice calls out from the back room. Lillie's and Joe's attention snap forward that in return El's head lurks back also and freezes with disbelief;

His blonde hair was utterly dishevelled, his muscles were poking under his work shirt that El's mouth suddenly became dry as she watched him move around the store, and finally his blue eyes were blazing as they landed on her's.

She knew that Lillie's eyes looked familiar.

It was Ben.

El was staring at him in amazement; whilst Lillie and Jo were staring at El holding in their laughs. El looked like a love-sick teenager as she licked her lips at the mere sight of him, words were ready to

erupt from her throat at any given moment but Ben beat her to it.

"We meet again Miss Late." They both chuckled at that, El was blushing at his words and for the fact that her *stupid, stupid* heart wouldn't stop racing as he walked closer towards her.

Joe was the first to speak, "You know my beautiful El?" He tilts his head curiously at Ben, watching in amusement at the way El's body reacted once she caught sight of his step son.

Ben lets out a steady laugh as he throws a hand against the back of his neck, rubbing at it gently. He licked his lips, laughing as the scene of how they met played over and over in his mind. "Well, I saved her from almost being crushed to death by a car. Luckily enough for her, I was there at the right place at the right time."

El grins sheepishly at his comment before pulling herself up from the chair and further to where he stood. Once they were at eye-level, meaning El's head barely grazed the top of his chin, she let out her hand for him to shake. It was a pitiful gesture, that she knew, but she was so nervous that she wanted to throw herself into the tulip garden and bury herself in it until she could find her voice.

He raised his eyebrows at her, peering down at her small form before slowly accepting her hand. Instead of shaking it, the way El was expecting him too, he firmly but gently pulled her hand to his lips and left a lengthy kiss that El was sure she'd be still feeling within the next few days.

"You can't fight fate." Joe happily cheered as he pulled Lillie off of his lap and onto her feet. He ran his hands through her soft hair and kissed her with so much passion that El felt almost embarrassed that she hadn't left the room.

It was a kiss that should've been behind closed doors but instead Joe appreciatively hummed into her mouth, before pulling away. Music from the mall had lingered into Happy Petals and without a second thought, he spun her around as Lillie giggled mercilessly and danced with one another around the store.

Cheerfully repeating; "*You can't fight fate.*"

Oh boy, how right he was.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

Here are the translations of what Joe was saying;

\***Bella ragazza** - Beautiful girl

\***Vieni qui angelo** - Come here angel

\***Amore mio, luce mia, il mio cuore viene qui** - My love, my light, my heart comes here

I hope you liked this chapter, yes! Ben is finally back and I'm excited to see where this will go. I'd love your thoughts, it makes me so happy to have all of your opinions because this is what keeps me from continuing on with this story. Just wanted to give a small shout out to Jazmine - thank you so much darling your comment made me smile! So thank you but also thank you to all the people that have stuck with this story.

Quick question - I feel like I should change the title of the story! I don't know if it suits it, what do you think?

(The song for this chapter is Drops Of Jupiter lyrics - Train)

Love you my darlings! Don't forget to share some love by favouriting, commenting and adding!

L xx

## 14. Chapter 14

*"If you didn't love him, this never would have happened. But you did. And accepting that love and everything that followed it is part of letting it go."*

— Sarah Dessen

You have (5) new voice messages.

El's eye's were weary as she stared at her alarm clock, 2:33 am it read. She mumbled and groaned relentlessly into her pillow as she reached for her phone. El's vision was clouded with sleep as she fumbled with her passcode, her vision hazy. Within a few seconds only El's heart seized within her chest as her brain read the name *over and over* -

Mike.

No matter how many months had passed between them and the endless nights of grieving, her heart always seemed to ache for him. She wasn't surprised though, this boy had been the love of her life, her first love and now what was he to her?

A reminder of why her heart had been left and shattered to pieces? She knew it would be years before she would feel like herself again, at least fully. With Ben it was different, a new beginning, perhaps even a fresh start. But he wouldn't ever compare to Mike. El knew he was easy on the eyes, a different kind of beauty that Mike didn't have but she still didn't yearn for him. Not the way she once had for a certain black-eyed boy. She could remember desperately craving for him and now it seems as though she craves to only get away from him.

Miles and miles away.

*Let it be free of him.*

That's what her head kept reminding her, a constant thought that never came to a stand-still. While her heart sobbed and pleaded for him through her ribcages, an attempt to break free and go find it's

soulmate. In other words; go find Mike.

Bet El couldn't. It was a never-ending battle between doing what was expected of her and what was wrong. There were days, when she was at her weakest point, where she stare at her car keys for hours and all thought's of doing what was right fell passed her head and escaped her. She had been ready to forgive and let go in those moments, to leap into his arms and smother herself in his embrace.

But she *just couldn't*, no, she *wouldn't* do that to herself.

To others El looked as though she was holding on, simply living and breathing without Mike. But couldn't they see past that? Couldn't they see the desperation written on her face every time Lucas or Dustin brought up an old memory, one that consisted of Mike in it. Couldn't they see that she was merely functioning, that everything burned and ached without Mike beside her. It seemed that they didn't notice, and El knew that maybe if she wasn't hurting she could become an actress.

Since her own friends couldn't see right through her act.

With a shuddering breath, El's fingers shakily pressed onto the messages. Heat began rushing to her cheeks, her eyebrows swiftly pulling into a frown.

(1) *First message received today at 1:39 am.*

"El, I miss you. Fuck - I need to see you. *Please*, I'm begging you. Let me fix this, I'm not ready to walk away and I don't think I ever will be."

**Message deleted.**

Her heart burned and throbbed beneath her chest, she didn't seem to breath as she deleted the first message and listened for the second with caution.

(2) *Second message received today at 1:45 am.*

"Sweetheart, you have to *listen* to me. Emily is nothing, she was nothing back than and will continue to be nothing now. Your all that

matters to me, you must know that. *How couldn't you know that*, there will never be another girl. El, I don't want anyone else if I can't have you. Just let me -"

### **Message deleted.**

Her fingers quickly rushed over the delete button as El pushed herself up against her bed, her sheet's dangling low on her hips now. El felt uneasy and her heart began hammering once again, it was all his fault. If he hadn't fucked Emily and crushed her heart, then maybe they wouldn't be in this mess right now. Maybe she wouldn't feel so alone and her heart wouldn't feel so heavy, but no, he had to go and ruin everything.

Her eye's hardened and her shoulders shook less as she braced herself for the third message, her gaze wandering out her opened window.

### **(3) Third message received today at 1:53 am.**

"What can I do? *Huh, baby?* Tell me how I can fix this and I will. I'll do whatever I can as long as we're okay again. I can't keep doing this anymore, *I won't*, because watching you move on pains me. I'm so sorry, do you hear me El? Can't you hear how I'm still so desperately in love with you?"

### **Message deleted.**

Every time El thought she could get through the pain, Mike had to go and do something like this that set her two steps back and now El was left feeling infuriated. She soldiered on though, without a second thought El played the next voicemail and she waited for the apologies to come but this one left her breathless;

### **(4) Fourth message received today at 2:00 am.**

"I thought about you the entire time, you know. It was never about finding someone else, I got scared. I thought I was ready to go out into the world with you by my side but I just couldn't. I was terrified that every guy out there would be able to see the beauty in you that can't see, the endless potential you have and I panicked. I knew Emily liked me, I used her and I was selfish, and for that I hate myself more

than you will ever know. I'm sorry I broke you. I'm sorry that I made you cry, but I don't want her. I don't want anyone else, please remember that."

### **Message deleted.**

Just one more message, her head chanted. Just one more and than it's all over. But that would be a lie now wouldn't it? Her and Mike wouldn't ever be over, even if she moved to opposite ends of the world. Not even if El had a loving husband and two children who adored her because it wouldn't be *him*. El knew that even if she '*moved on*' it wouldn't be sincere. She'd always imagine her husband to be someone else and she'd always try and picture her kids with curly black hair when instead they had blonde straight hair and brown eyes *to match their Father's and their Mother's*.

And she hated herself even more for admitting that.

But she hated herself more for the way her heart lurched forward and a lump formed in her throat as the messages came to a close.

### **(5) Fifth message received today at 2:07am.**

"Forgive me, El. Forgive me for destroying us, I know I fucked up badly. That I  *Fucked us* up and now I'm left with the reminder of not having you here with me. Come home, baby. Please, I can't do this without you anymore. I will fight for us, and I won't stop fighting for you. I know you can hear me. I. Won't. Ever. Stop. Fighting. For. Us."

### **Message deleted.**

With a piercing scream, El lurched her phone forward and threw it against her bedroom wall. She watched in shock as it smashed with such force that the screen shattered to pieces immediately, leaving the phone sprawled across her carpet. El's breathes were jagged and rough, her hands clawed there way around her throat as she fought for breath.

Her breaths remained uncalm and in a frenzy as she dropped to her knees and stared at the mess bared out in front of her. She knew she couldn't keep doing this to herself, she needed to fix this mess.

She was ready to see him, to tell him what she *needed from him*. She was ready to take and take from him until he had nothing left to give her. Because that's what he had done to her right? He took and took until one day in the blink of an eye her heart hang low and there was tears in her eye's as she found out about Emily.

It was now or never, El thought.

She was ready as ever to see Mike, her Mike, and it scared her.

**AUTHORS NOTE:**

**Thought's please? I know it was a pretty rushed chapter but I felt bad because I hadn't updated in a very long time. Hope you liked it!**

Have a blessed day,

L x

## 15. Chapter 15

*This was it.*

Her breath came out short through her lips as her heart hammered heavily in her chest. It had been months. Her emotions had been dragged out long enough. In the span of such a short time El never felt so defeated; *so worn out*.

Although this time El didn't hate her ex husband as much anymore. It didn't mean she was ready to forgive him just yet, no, it was time to move on. She was at a standstill, a part of her longed to move on and have Mike back in her life but that was what her heart wanted desperately. Her head though, that was a different story, one that pointed out if El chose to forgive Mike would she actually ever trust him again.

Could she ever look past the affair? All those secrets that seemed to unravel the moment El decided to open her eyes. El blames herself though, Mike had always been someone she could trust. Hell, Mike made it pretty god damn clear to the whole town of Hawkins that she belonged to him just as much as he belonged to her.

And because of that, because of his heroic actions and romantic gestures, it just made everything shatter around her. Her relationships broke within months, her family worried about her and it was El's responsibility to pick up what was left of herself. But she's never done that before, because Mike never let it get that bad.

She was half a person without him; half a heart and half a soul and that's when she realised that wasn't how it was supposed to be.

Yes, she couldn't deny she'd always love Mike and that no one would ever compare. But love wasn't supposed to be ugly, it wasn't supposed to make us grasp at our chests in pain. No, love wasn't like that at all but what El had to figure out for herself within those months was that love wasn't a fairy-tale either.

Love can be beautiful. So beautiful that it can consume you, it's like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders when your around them.

The smallest things matter all of a sudden; it starts with little glances, touching hands, shy first kisses and then finally their touch begins to burn.

It burns and burns when there not around you everyday, when there side of the bed is empty. Your throat burns and your lungs ache because the tears just won't fucking stop. The pain is excruciating and doesn't seem to ever end, even when you try to pick up the broken pieces in your life, your still remembering the reason behind all this mess.

And the reason is because of *her*.

El used to blame her for everything. Why wouldn't she? She was the reason for their broken marriage. That's what she'd remind herself over and over, it couldn't be anything else but that. But she was wrong, it hadn't just been all of Emily's doing.

No, Mike had a big part of it. With his doe eyes and charm that left every girl either congratulating El or sending envious glances her way. But this time it hadn't been just glances, or passing smiles between Mike and another woman. El knew that she couldn't stop girls from admiring him, he was beautiful, El knew that wasn't what most wives would call their husbands but it was just the truth.

Everything screamed out beautiful when you heard the name Mike Wheeler. Between his toothy smile to his alluring presence he was simply just that word; *beautiful*.

*Her beautiful boy.*

Well, *was*, but in her mind she'd always refer him as just that. *Hers*.

El's head snapped up at the sound of his front door beginning to open. El nearly doubles over as she takes him in, breaths him in. It's him, it's really him. She didn't know if he'd answer her. As he stood there silently, his hand twitching at his side as though he was desperate to touch her, El knew he still felt it.

There connection was somehow still there.

With a shuddering breath she collected herself before he could see

she was beginning to slowly crash down at the sight of him. She squared her shoulders and met his eye before murmuring the words;

"We need to talk."

**AUTHORS NOTE;**

**Here's a little updated tease for u all.**

**I'm sad, have boy problems of my own, so I hope u liked it. :(**

**L x**

## 16. Chapter 16

"How do you know when it's over?"

"Maybe when you feel more in love with your memories than with the person standing in front of you."

— Gunnar Ardelius

**AUTHOR - Please listen to the song 'Wait – by M83'**

"El." Mike's breath was heaving as he eyes danced over every inch of El's body.

It was almost as if he was examining her, savouring every inch and keeping it for his memory only. The thought alone would've made her feel uneasy, if it had been any other person though, but it's *Mike*.

She remained firm, every part of her tense as she stood still, her head grazing the top of Mike's chin. She didn't even remember how he somehow got close to her, she could feel his warm breath press against her forehead. The act alone made El warm, but not in the way she intended it to, her body relaxed as it prepared for one of his lazy forehead kisses. That was the usual routine when he had once been so close to her but instead the act alone seemed so damn foreign to her, it scared her to even remember a time before all this sadness, *this heartache*.

'Can I come in?' Her voice was steady and slow, but inside her heart screamed with what was repeated joy to be in her home, *their* home, for the first time in *months*.

This was it, now was the time to let go of Mike, for good.

'Of course,' Mike stammered out, quickly brushing past El and opening the door for her. A smile was planted across his face and El was so close that she could almost count every freckle wedged across his nose. Her heart felt heavy and hammered against her chest just by the sight of him.

El murmured out a quick thank you before scurrying into the lounge room, her eyes widened in disbelief though. Every single picture of

them remained; their wedding day photo was still beside Mike's favourite chair by the window pane, an old polaroid picture of their first date in elementary; even there first anniversary together as husband and wife was framed amongst the lot.

And El's heart grew sad by this, sadder as every second past because it was evident Mike hadn't given up. . .

*But she had.*

Is this what it means to become out of love with someone? El had loved him with every fibre of her being once, and she would defy anyone that dare question her undying love for this boy. Before all the tears were unleashed, before all the heartbreak had become present, she was undoubtfully happy.

So through all of her happiness, how couldn't she of known Mike wasn't feeling the same way she was? How couldn't she of sensed he was slipping away through her finger tips every day that passed?

El wanted to ask him so many questions; *'That night when you cheated, was it easier to feel and touch another women's body then my own?'* or *'Are you holding on to us because you're scared to see if we could love another person the same way we once did?'*

"Mike," El say's lightly. "Can I ask you something?"

Mike nods his head eagerly, but El noticed his eyes weren't dancing with joy like they were moments before. Instead they appeared dull, almost lifeless, as if he was bracing himself for the impact that was laid out in front of him.

El swallows hard and forces the words out before she could stop herself. 'Why are you doing this?'

"Because I want you," he says with such ease that she feels flushed against his gaze. She let out a shuddering breath, and suddenly, a small sob seemed to wedge its way to her throat as well.

'Here's the thing,' She clears her throat and looks away from him, her gaze planted firmly on their captured wedding day. They both looked so happy, so in love it was surreal, and now look at them.

*They were broken.*

'From the moment I met you, you brought out the best of me. You taught me to love and to be loved, and in that moment you were the best thing that has ever happened to me.' El raises her head to look up at him, her cheeks weren't the ones wet with unleashed tears, but his instead.

She continues on; 'The truth is, we both have never had the chance to love anyone else but each other. If Emily – or any other woman has once made you think of a future without me in it, then why don't you give it a try?'

He looked at her with such sadness, even to El he seemed so fragile, almost as if her words sliced right through him.

'No. . . .' He sobbed out, 'I don't want that. I want you, I will always want you El.' the look in his eyes made El's heart lurch with grief. He couldn't look away from her, and she realised she had been just as selfish in their marriage as he had. She depended on him for everything, even her happiness, and that's not how a relationship is supposed to be.

He may be reason to blame for the cheating, but El had broken him in other ways too. She made him scared, utterly terrified to be apart from her. To be able to imagine a life or time where she wouldn't be by his side, almost as if she was half of him. Half of his soul; his entire being, and for the first time since being away from her husband she knew that wasn't healthy.

Not in the slightest bit.

"El," he whispered. With such ache, a sharp throbbing pain pressed against both of their chests.

They both knew what was happening, what was to come. It was like a sudden car crash, with such force, it couldn't be stopped.

I gave him a sad smile, wondering if this would be one of the last time's I'd be this close to him.

'I want you too, always, but I don't need you. Not anymore and you

don't need me either. Face it, we've been holding onto something that just keeps on breaking no matter what we do. Our love won't fix this, nothing will and I want to start living my life again. Don't you?' El rushes out, her eyes desperate and fierce as she stares at him with such certainty.

The room feels too small, almost as if it's about to close in on the both of them.

All of a sudden he laughs, it's desperate and raw and El doesn't know what to do. Should she touch him, or stay where she is and watch him become his own undoing. The laughing doesn't stop and neither does his tears, he's starting to let go.

He's letting go of his mistakes; of the betrayal, breaking his own heart but also his first love, and finally. . . .

He is letting go of El.

"Every time I see you, I'm broken just by looking at you." he admitted, pushing his loose curls from his forehead. His voice is croaky and wounded, and El wants to touch him. She doesn't think, She just moves to him. El grabs at what she can and presses her face to his clothed chest and breathes him in one last time.

She promised she wouldn't do this to herself but he needed this, he needed her and El will give Mike all of her as much as she can.

He wraps his arms around her and presses himself against her with such intensity that they both become undone. He reaches for her lips and without a second thought he kisses El. They both moan at the sensation and warmth that flows through the kiss.

This kiss was different, *it was saying goodbye to their memories, to their marriage, to Mike and El.*

'I will always love you, don't you ever forget that. Promise me – *please*, promise me Sweetheart that you will never let any man break you the way I did.' When El finally pulls away, she looks at him, stares right through him and wants to cry.

Cry with happiness, with anguish, with disbelief that this is really it

between them. She's a bundle of nerves and is running out of words to say to him, but she can feel there once *old love* floating away.

It's new, it's different and slowly it's unfolding around her and she doesn't know how to piece herself together. Where did that strong girl just go?

El's hands fall to her sides as Mike steps back from her hold, his face paling as he speaks his next few words slowly. 'Don't think I don't want to fight for you, everything inside me is burning saying these things to you. I won't fall in love again – not the way we did. Our love was beautiful and I'm sorry I tainted it.'

He inhaled sharply, like something had finally cut the rope that tethered him to her. Shock sent her heart crashing against her as he moved his way to their wedding picture. He grasped it tightly and looked so lost as he pried it into El's hands.

He muttered the next three words that left El breathless and stone cold;

'I love you.'

She all at once watched him walk away from her, his silhouette leaving there once loved room. All the laughter, light and loved was erased the moment he uttered those words.

No more endless chasing from him, there wouldn't be a trace left of Mike anywhere anymore, not even a hint of his scent on her pillow.

She felt renewed,

She felt transformed,

And throughout all her new emotions the one thing that seeped through her was that;

*She didn't have Mike anymore.*

**FORGIVE MEEEEEE**

## 17. Chapter 17

(EL'S POV):

This is officially it.

I'm no longer Mrs Wheeler, it's a foreign feeling I'm not used too. I have my last name back, and I still don't feel any different. Sadness still lurks up at me occasionally when I think of him, the nights are the worst though; that's when the memories creep in and I lay awake for hours on end.

But I embrace change, I embrace not being somebody else's. I turn and look around my apartment, boxes had been filled, clothes sprawled out across my bed and endless piles of newspapers scattered around my feet. I smile at the mess, Mike hated mess, despised it, and I couldn't help but let out a little laugh.

I move to where the boxes are and begin packing again. I fill it with my favourite mugs then begin adding all my picture frames next. I stop and stare ever so slowly as I come across Mike and I's wedding picture. I stare and admire what used to be us, where smiling in the photo. Our eyes were filled with so much light and love that I couldn't help but smile back at the photo.

My eye's wandered and landed on my wedding ring. I still wore it, don't ask me why because I don't even know myself these days. It was a beautiful ring - that could've been the reason, or maybe I was a little bit selfish and wanted to keep this little piece of my old life all too myself.

I hadn't seen Mike since that day we truly ended for good. I haven't seen anyone really, not that people haven't tried. Max calls relentlessly, Luca's won't stop leaving voicemails and even Mike's Mother sends me flowers every once in awhile.

Listen, I know I'm lucky to have such a supportive group of people. but - everything still reminds me of my old life with him. Every place in this town has a memory with him that is so embedded in my brain, my frowns are starting to appear more. I've thought about dating,

Ben keep's appearing in my thoughts somehow, but deep down, I know I'm not ready yet.

The question is. . . .

Will I ever be?

Can I even fathom the idea of loving someone else completely opposite to *him*?

Some would say that's the entire point, to be with someone entirely different to your ex. Someone new and refreshing, with different ventures and ideas that don't scream out Mike.

When I try and imagine being with someone else right now, my mouth becomes dry and my throat tightens. I look at Ben and I could imagine a life with him, one that would envision a white picket fence with blue shutters. A life that consisted of three kids and a dog called Marley. It sounds lovely, but is that even what I want?

I thought about children, but with only one person. Now that person is gone and so are those thoughts. Now, I don't know if I could be a Mother to someone else. Someone that didn't inherit big curls and endless swirls of brown, and I'm scared of that.

Since my marriage ended I've had a lot of time to think, maybe too much time. Every moment and thought dawned on me and made me rethink every choice I made. If Mike hadn't cheated now, would he have later on in our marriage? What if he never betrayed me and we were together. . . and still undeniably happy. So happy that it radiated everywhere we went. I still had so much to think about, and so much I wished to tell Mike but didn't want to keep mentioning.

So, 10 minutes later into my thought's, I began writing him a letter;

*Mike,*

I'm scared to face another day if I don't open up to you completely.

This fear in me won't go away, this fear that I will always love you and I won't be able to stop. I will still try though, for us, I'm sorry I'm calling the shots for us both now but I know I'm making the right

decision.

I'm sorry if this letter surprised you, I don't want to burden you, but I don't want to keep these thoughts stuck in my head for however long they choose to stay. I used to tell you everything, and you would listen and never judge me. . . I'm not strong enough to face you to say these things to you in person. But writing, well, I think I can manage just that.

I won't be bitter if you choose not to reply, and I can't promise that these letters will stop coming. Because Mike, before you were my husband, you were also my best friend who I need desperately right now. I love you, I love that I think of you when I need to let go of my thoughts. But I need to start loving myself a hell of a lot more. . .

And these letters are gonna let these angered thoughts go and make me, well, *me again*.

I hope you are thriving Mike, and I will never stop hoping either.

Yours,

El.

**Thoughts? LEAVE A COMMENT IF YA LIKE IT SO FAR THX**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS**

**XXXXXX**